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EDITORIAL PREFACE

> "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

No section of the population of India can afford to neglect her ancient heritage. In her literature, philosophy, art, and regulated life there is much that is worthless, much also that is distinctly unhealthy; yet the treasures of knowledge, wisdom, and beauty which they contain are too precious to be lost. Every citizen of India needs to use them, if he is to be a cultured modern Indian. This is as true of the Christian, the Muslim, the Zoroastrian as of the Hindu. But, while the heritage of India has been largely explored by scholars, and the results of their toil are laid out for us in their books, they cannot be said to be really available for the ordinary man. The volumes are in most cases expensive, and are often technical and difficult. Hence this series of cheap books has been planned by a group of Christian men, in order that every educated Indian, whether rich or poor, may be able to find his way into the treasures of India's past. Many Europeans, both in India and elsewhere, will doubtless be glad to use the series.

The utmost care is being taken by the General Editors in selecting writers, and in passing manuscripts for the press. To every book two tests are rigidly applied: everything must be scholarly, and everything must be sympathetic. The purpose is to bring the best of the ancient treasuries, so that it may be known, enjoyed, and used.

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THE HERITAGE OF INDIA SERIES

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

HIS LIFE AND WORK

BY

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To

BRAJENDRANATH SEAL.

'SHOULD OLD ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOT?'

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PREFACE

WHEN I promised to do this book, two years ago, I knew I was foolish. My task would have been difficult, had my subject been an English writer. There is no Western author of repute whose pen is not frugal, compared with Rabindranath Tagore's. Through days filled to overflowing with other work I have been oppressed by the knowledge that, even in my own tongue, Rabindranath was all the while lecturing and writing faster than I could hope to read. I cannot pretend to have read more than a considerable fraction of the enormous output of his fifty years of incessant activity. Much of that output has never got beyond the magazines. My comfort is that perhaps not one of his own countrymen has read the whole of it.

Those who have themselves made the effort of compressing a vast theme into a small handbook will be the most lenient to my shortcomings. The poet has enjoyed nine years of world-wide fame, yet this little book is, so far as my knowledge goes, the only essay in English which is in any degree based upon study of the original Bengali. This surprising fact justifies an Englishman's attempt. I believe the poet is misunderstood in the West—is underpraised, by some overpraised, is wrongly praised. But his own countrymen have been content to grumble. Not one has come forward to help the world to place a poet who cannot be ignored but of whom every possible opinion is enter-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

tained in Europe and America, from his apotheosis as the last and most wonderful teacher of the ages to his contemptuous dismissal as a charlatan.[1]

I am indebted to the *Modern Review* (published, Calcutta), which for many years has been a mirror of his activities, especially as prosewriter and travelling lecturer, and is invaluable on that side of his work. Its editor, Babu Ramananda Chatterji, has made prompt and generous response to many calls which I have made on his knowledge. I owe a debt to the brilliant sketch of the Neo-Romantic Movement in Bengal, in Dr. Brajendranath Seal's *New Essays in Criticism*, and to Ajitkumar Chakrabarti's little book, *Rabindranath*. I owe a debt which I cannot exaggerate to Babu Prasanta Mahalanobis; without his help I could have done nothing. That help has left its mark on every page. Among colleagues, Babu Sarojkumar Biswas has helped me with Bengali texts. Among students, Satyakinkar Kabiraj has read many hundreds of pages of Rabindranath's poetry with me and given invaluable assistance in translation, so that my versions are often as much his as mine; Narayanchandra Ghosh has an equal claim to the passage quoted from *Evening Songs*, in Chapter III. The Rev. A. M. Spencer read proofs.

Translations, except when from *Gitanjali* or *My Reminiscences*, are my own or by the two students mentioned above. I thank the poet for generous permission to translate and for the gift of his portrait. Transliteration of proper names presented a problem. It seemed best to follow Dr. Farquhar's advice. So I

[1] I have just had my attention drawn to a book by Basanta Koomar Roy, published in America (I believe). I have not seen it, and do not know if it has any merit.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

have used Bengali forms throughout, except in the case of Kalidasa, Valmiki, and Vidyapati. Every well-known name I have treated as anglicised, extending this rule to cover as many words as possible. Thus, I have printed Bolpur and not Bōlpur, Rabindranath and not Rabindranāth, Brahmo Samaj and not *Brāhmo Samāj*, Kalidasa and not Kālidāsa. Lastly, in words treated as unnaturalised I have ignored all marks of length or consonantal distinction, except the two which are essential to approximately correct pronunciation—*i.e.* I have marked only ō and ā (the vowel *a*, as distinct from the included vowel which every Bengali consonant carries, which, though transliterated as *a*, is pronounced far more as a short *o* in English). In ignoring the alleged difference between short i and long i, short u and long u, I have the support of my own ears and of the poet's express testimony that there *is* no difference (in pronunciation, that is). I have not printed *śakta* but *sakta*; not Chaṇḍi but Chandi. To sum up: I have treated as unnaturalised only titles of books and a very few other words, including proper names of characters in Rabindranath Tagore's books. This will not please the scholar. But I have written for the general reader, who finds an abundance of dots and accents vexing.

The reader who cares for a much fuller and more detailed examination of Tagore's work will find it in my *Poetry of Rabindranath Tagore* (Oxford University Press; shortly).

Wesleyan College, Bankura,
16-7-1921. E. J. T.

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CONTENTS

Chap.		Page
	Preface	ix
	PART I. LIFE.	
I.	Early Life; First Literary Period	1
II.	Later Life; Many-sided Activity	29
	PART II. WORK.	
III.	The Poet and Creative Artist	61
IV.	The Reformer and Seer	87

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PART I—LIFE

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I

EARLY LIFE; FIRST LITERARY PERIOD

BENGALI POETRY: SOURCES AND INSPIRATIONS. Bengali literature has a double line of descent. The older is lineal from Sanskrit literature, and especially from Sanskrit lyric and drama. More than the great epics, the writings of Kalidasa have inspired a succession of poets in the Ganges valley. Jayadeva, in his *Gita Govinda*, in the twelfth century carried the classical style in its decadence into Bengal, of which he was a native—into Bengal, though not into Bengali, for he wrote in Sanskrit. His poem is Vaisnava, in the floweriest and most sensuous strain.

The second line of descent is the indigenous one of folk-lyric. A main current of this, also, is Vaisnava, in the songs of Chandidas and Vidyapati, who wrote in the fourteenth century. Chandidas wrote in Bengali, Vidyapati in Maithili. But Bengal has adopted Vidyapati as her own.

The Vaisnava tradition continues the strongest to this day. Just as the softer beauty of Kalidasa's poetry has touched the Bengali imagination far more than the sterner grace of the epics, so the cult of Krishna has made that of Rama sink very much into the background. The race is emotional beyond any other in India, and Vaisnava revivalists have again and again set flowing a wave of excitement which has covered the province. Of these the most famous was Chaitanya, in the sixteenth century—Chaitanya, whom the sight of *kadamba*[1] trees in blossom would throw into ecstasy by reminding him of his beloved Hari, god of Springtide revels, Chaitanya,

[1] *Nauclea kadumba.*

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

who walked into the sea at Puri, in a trance of adoration, and was never seen again.[1] He was no poet, but poets followed in the wake of the fervour which he initiated. But a sterner cult, the *sākta*,[2] has contributed its strain to folk-poetry. The sixteenth century Mukundaram *Kabikankan*[3] was a *sākta*; and perhaps the most popular of all songs are those of Ramprasad, a *sakta* who wrote in the time of Warren Hastings. His songs can be heard everywhere, and on everyone's lips. There is a vast amount of anonymous folk-poetry, variant on a few simple phrases and themes, to which the individual singer can give a turn of pathos or imaginative beauty. And there are legends, of which some belong to the great stock of Indian mythology, but others are local; many of these have been made accessible to the West, by such well-known writers as Lalbihari De and Sister Nivedita (Miss Margaret Noble).

THE INFLUENCE OF THE WEST IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. 1. *On Literature.* Into this double stream of literary and intellectual tradition, whose diverse waters hardly mingled, the *pandits* and the folk-poets keeping aloof from one another for the most part, came in the nineteenth century the life and thought of modern Europe. No part of India was so powerfully affected by 'the New Learning' as Bengal. The tide came first through Christian teaching, the work of the Baptist missionaries at Serampur,[4] and, especially of William Carey. Of his manifold services to India this is not the place to speak; but he took all knowledge as his province, from grammar to botany, and he set Indian *pandits* working at translation and compilation. A great Indian, Rammohan Ray, gave the new-found Bengali prose that distinction which only genius could provide, and which neither native scholar nor foreigner could give. He produced the first Bengali prose which

[1] There are other stories of his disappearance.

[2] Worship of the Motherhood of God, of Strength, identified with the goddess Durga.

[3] Author of *Chandi*. *Kabikankan* means 'Gem of Poets.'

[4] Correctly Srirampur.

can claim permanent place as literature. The modern education, in the thirties introduced by Dr. Duff on religious lines, and on secular ones (more than a dozen years earlier) by David Hare and Rammohan Ray, had immediate and tremendous results. Other influences contributed, among them the short-lived but electric force of that 'marvellous boy,' Derozio. The modern age of Bengali literature began; by the sixties an extraordinary ferment was at work. There were minds of many types busy; the patience of Iswarchandra Bidyasagar, purist and scholar; the sober skill of Hemchandra Banerji, introducing new but not very exciting lyric forms, such a decorous beginning as Bryant gave to American literature; the energy and intellectual force of Bankimchandra Chatterji, the novelist, 'the Scott of Bengal'; the unequal and grandiose conception of Nabinchandra Sen, 'the Byron of Bengal.' Greatest of all, in literature, there had come the genius of Michael Madhusudhan[1] Datta, 'the Milton of Bengal,' the naturaliser of the sonnet and of blank verse, whose epic, the *Meghnādbodhkābya*, handling Sanskrit classical legend in an essentially romantic spirit, is to this day the darling work of his countrymen. With the old school (and with the majority of the new) the statement that Rabindranath Tagore is a greater poet than Michael rouses scoffing anger.

2. *On Religion.* There was religious change, also. Carey and Rammohan Ray fought primarily for religious and social reform. How brave and successful a battle it was men realise to-day, remembering that widows are no longer burned on the banks of Hugli, recognising, too, how much of Christian thought has been adopted into the very breath of Hinduism. The Christian missionaries were not alone in their belief that Hindus were idolaters. The belief was strongly held by the early Brahmos,[2] a fact which amazes the rationalist

[1] He took the name, *Michael*, on becoming a Christian.

[2] Custom has by now prescribed this spelling, *Brāhmo* for *Brāhma*; and, inverted[illegible], a long o sound has come into the Bengali pronunciation, though not into the spelling.

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Hindu of today. It was the incentive to the enthusiastic propaganda of Debendranath Tagore, the poet's father, a passionate hater of idolatry, if ever there was one. In this belief Rammohan Ray founded the Brahmo Samaj, a theistic association. A presentation copy of his *Precepts of Jesus*, in my possession, contains the inscription, 'Wishing the success of the cause of truth and the total annihilation of idolatry in all forms whatever.' The Samaj was gradually constituted out of vague beginnings, and rightly traces itself to the inspiration of the great reformer and to the small, like-minded band whom he gathered round him. After Rammohan Ray's death in 1833, it was kept just alive by the devoted Ramachandra Bidyabagish and by Dwarkanath Tagore, who had been Rammohan Ray's chief supporter. Dwarkanath Tagore, like Rammohan Ray, visited England, where he was received with great distinction and known as Prince Dwarkanath Tagore. When he died, he left a confused tradition of regal munificence and extravagance and a load of heavy debts which his famous son carried and paid, going very far beyond any legal obligation. That son, the *Maharshi*,[1] was father of the poet. He has abundant claims to remembrance on his own account. His austere and noble life, his singularly lofty and courageous character, won the veneration of his countrymen, as his title indicates. He set the Brahmo Samaj on a firm basis; and, if Rammohan Ray was its founder, he was its first lawgiver. His *Autobiography* is one of the most interesting and least morbid of all spiritual documents, an exceptional book in every way. With him for a time worked the brilliant Keshabchandra Sen; but he broke away in 1866, causing the first of the Brahmo schisms.

RABINDRANATH THE REPRESENTATIVE MAN OF BENGALI LITERATURE AND THOUGHT. It has been part of Rabindranath's greatness that he has gathered up into his work all these influences, and has cut a channel in which all these streams have flowed. To the classical

[1] Or, *Great Sage*.

and folk-poetry traditions he has joined the eager curiosity of the most modern mind Bengal has known, with a very wide, if not very deep, acquaintance with physical science. The beauty of his religious poetry has made him world-famous; but he was a love-poet first, and a nature-poet first and last and throughout his work. In literature, he has been the representative man of his time, in touch with the fulness of his intellectual heritage. Even in language he has been a mediator and reconciler. He brought the diction of the road and market into poetry, and married it with the great style of Sanskrit literature.

His Home and Surroundings. He was fortunate in his home. There is a Bengali proverb that the goddesses of Learning and Good Fortune, Saraswati and Lakshmi, will not live together. Yet an exception must be admitted in the case of the Tagores. The family has known times of embarrassment and debt, but it has remained throughout one of the very first families of Bengal, with extensive possessions in land. At any rate, the poet has never known the grinding penury of so many of his 'threadbare, goldless genealogie.'[1] Indeed, I do not think financial difficulty has ever been the cause of anything that was done or left undone in his education and upbringing. But, though Lakshmi has been good to the poet, who has praised her in many a tender personification—Lakshmi, the ever-gracious, ever-smiling goddess—Saraswati might be said to have made his home her temple. No other family has a record like the Tagores. In addition to the distinction of leading the thought of the Brahmo Samaj and of so much of society in other than religious ways, in the persons of Prince Dwarkanath and his son the *Maharshi*, the family has been rich in genius and talent. Rabindranath's eldest brother, Dwijendranath, now living in happy, extreme old age at Bolpur, is philosopher, and possessor of a prose style adequate to his thought; another brother, Jyotirindra, is an amateur artist

[1] Henry Vaughan, *To His Friend* (in *Olor Iscanus*).

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

whose pencilled heads have won the enthusiastic praise of Mr. Will Rothenstein—'I know few modern portrait drawings that show greater beauty and insight.'[1] A third brother was the first Indian to enter the Civil Service. His nephews, Abanindranath and Gaganendranath, are the Great Twin Brethren of Bengali, or, indeed, Indian Art. The former is head of the Art School which attracts pupils from all parts of the land, and often from foreign lands; for a long time, he was headmaster of the Government Art School. His paintings have now a world-wide reputation, several being particularly well known. He writes short stories, especially for children; writes as well as he paints, according to Dr. Brajendranath Seal. His brother, Gaganendranath, is unequalled as a black-and-white artist. The family leads in music no less than in the other arts; and the women are only less talented than the men. So that Rabindranath, from his earliest days, grew up in the one house where all the surging tides of the Indian Renaissance might flow round his daily life, and fill the air he breathed with the exhilaration of their fresh airs. That rambling Jorasanko[2] house held

> 'magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas in faery lands'

that were anything but forlorn—rather, their waters thronged with the white sails of innumerable and noisy, eager voyagers.

Boyhood. He was born on May 6th, 1861. His *Reminiscences* have sketched the story of his early days. His austere father, more and more withdrawn from the world, yet aware of everything that happened in his vast household, was at first a pervading presence, seldom seen or spoken with. The boy lost his mother in childhood, and his up-bringing devolved much on to servants. Of these first days he writes critically. Yet he does not seem to have had much to complain of. Tutors were provided, to whom he paid little attention.

[1] Introduction to *Twenty-five Collotypes*.
[2] The Calcutta quarter where the Tagore family-house is.

Schools were tried, which he soon managed to escape. All his life, he has declined the orthodox paths, with great satisfaction to himself and with almost unalloyed gain to his poetry. He was one of those boys who are unfitted for any sort of rough-and-tumble. It took a lot of apprenticeship to life, to make him forget his shrinking nervousness. His real education came, not from the desultory and experimental alternation of tutor and school, with a background of time spent with servants, but from the whole circumstances and environment of his life. The Jorasanko house is a vast, rambling congeries of mansions and rooms, representing the whims of many generations. These run round a central courtyard, and look out upon crowded Calcutta. In the poet's youth, he could watch the strange, alien life of the poor who inhabited a cluster of miserable huts before the great house; and perhaps the dominant picture of his *Reminiscences* is that of a dreaming, interested child, standing with face pressed against the veranda railings. He could watch, too, the folk who came to bathe in the tank; and in these early days his mind was already storing many a vignette, many a swiftly-taken glimpse of habit or idiosyncrasy. Within doors was a life so varied and busy that it was abundant compensation for the outside fair that he missed, except as spectator. Here every movement found echoes, and the political and literary and religious disturbances rippled against these banks. His brothers were eager and full of genius. He was encouraged to write verse almost as soon as he could walk; and he was a member of secret societies that studied politics in what was felt by their members (though not by Government) to be a very bold and revolutionary freedom. Music and drama were the air he breathed. He has told us of the way his eldest brother entranced the household with the poetical opulence of his *Dream-Journey*,[1] and of the way his fourth brother improvised melody after melody.[2] The women were

[1] *My Reminiscences* (translation, p. 122).
[2] *My Reminiscences* (translation, p. 196).

hardly less gifted, and were certainly not less eager. The shy, sensitive boy made friends early with women, and found the best and most delightful of confidantes in his brother Jyotirindra's wife. Her death was the event which clouded his young manhood, years later.

His boyhood had notable experiences. He went into the country, a few miles above Calcutta, and his *Reminiscences* tell of the ecstasy with which he first saw fresh mornings and unspoiled sunsets. In words often quoted, 'every morning, as I awoke, I somehow felt the day coming to me like a new gilt-edged letter with some unheard-of news awaiting me on the opening of the envelope. And, lest I should lose any fragment of it, I would hurry through my toilet to my chair outside.'[1] Past the garden flowed the Ganges, in later days the lifeblood pulsing through his manifold work in prose and verse. Then his father, an incessant traveller, took the boy with him. He stayed some time at Bolpur, which today is world-famous for his school and retreat. It was characteristic of the boy that he should keep his eyes tightly closed, when journeying the two miles between the railway station and his father's home. He was unwilling to have anything gradual or disenchanting about his first-sight. After Bolpur, came a month in Amritsar, and then the Himalayas.

BENGAL: ITS LANDSCAPES. There are two Bengals. There is Bengal by the Ganges, a land of luxuriant vegetation, of fields of an incredible lushness and greenness, of pools where black-and-white kingfishers dart and hawk, of great white-headed kites sitting on telegraph wires and poles, of stretching sandbanks climbing out of the lazy stream to sun their broad backs, of drowsy, drifting sails, and of that mighty, worshipped river. This is the Bengal which Rabindranath knows and has celebrated in countless passages, his life one with its life of steady flow and sudden storm and flood. He knows its rain-swollen currents, its dreadful roar and tussle of cloud and lightning and

[1] *My Reminiscences* (translation, p. 45).

thunder, its exquisite peace and stillness, its vast spaces. Then there is the other Bengal, lifted off the malaria-belt, dry and arid, a land where sandstone crops up, and laterite, where the jungle is *sāl*[1] and mimosa and rough tangle of zizyph, with splits and fissures where dwarf date-palms grow and which *palās*[2] crowds in Spring with brick-red flowers. This Bengal, judging by his work, he hardly knows at all. His knowledge of it came late, when he settled at Bolpur,—for this first Bolpur sojourn was a very brief one, and the years of his manhood were spent beside or upon the great flood of the Ganges. Hence, his forests are conventional, are 'flowery forests' and entirely lack any distinctive word which shows that he has seen. But his river-scenes are as perfect as they are numerous. He is a river-poet, first and last. The Himalayas were the very soul of his father's passionate delight. But to the son they have been very little. They are magnificent scenery—towering, dripping forests, and slopes on which he has gathered a few charming conceits and comparisons occasionally. They have never given his spirit a home. In this respect, he differs not only from his father, but from his master, Kalidasa, a mountain-poet, if there ever was one.

His Writings: Beginnings and Juvenilia (1875-81). In his *Reminiscences*, he has left some desultory notes on his first appearances in print.[3] These occurred before he was fifteen. He thus has the doubtful honour of standing beside Cowley and Mrs. Browning in precocity; and his first productions were no more valuable than theirs. Verse and criticism appeared in *Gyānānkur—Sprouting Knowledge.* His brother Jyotirindra launched many projects, among them a line of patriotic (*i.e.* Bengali-owned and run) steamers and a monthly, the *Bhārati.* The latter enterprise had the boy-poet as one of the crew, and for long enough it was his medium of expression, so much so that his first fifteen

[1] *Shorea robusta.* [2] *Butea frondosa.*
[3] *My Reminiscences* (translation, pp. 134 seq.).

years of literary activity might be called the *Bharati* period. His first long poem, *The Poet's Story*, saw the light in *Bharati*, and presently in book-form,—his first work to attain that distinction. In was his *Endymion* or *Alastor*. But for long enough he was to be writing *Endymions* and *Alastors*. It was no accident that Shelley became his favourite poet for a time. The shadowy world of a poet's inner adventures, of his loneliness, of his vast, vague, universal benevolence of love,—this spacious world held him in thrall, as the Realm of Faery held True Thomas. In such a world, years may pass and yet seem to the captive like weeks. Another book, *Banaphul—Wild Flowers*—appeared about the same time, a collection of his lyrics, written at the mature age of between eleven and fifteen. Their character is sufficiently indicated by the book's title. Only a few keep their place in his collected works. He wrote, too, verse tales, *Gatha*, lyrical ballads, influenced by Scott. Wrote, also, most of the *Bhanu Singh* songs, with which, as nearly twenty are still in print, his literary career is usually considered to have begun.

Rabindranath has always been exceedingly susceptible to the simpler melodies, drawn by these far more than by the great classical achievements of the Muse, which win intellectual recognition from him rather than enthusiasm.[1] The lyric forms which Hemchandra Banerji was introducing from English were too ordered and conventional to take his fancy, but such artless strains as the songs of Biharilal Chakrabarti charmed him, and so, even more, did the old Vaisnava lyrics. He read about Chatterton, and, as was natural, his imagination was fired to emulation. He incarnated his Muse as *Bhanu Singh—Lion of the Sun*—a sort of play on his name, *Rabi*, which means *Sun*—a supposed ancient Vaisnava lyrist. His intense admiration for the Sikhs and their martial history, so unlike anything in the annals of his own race, was probably responsible for the *Singh*. With these pseudo-archaic songs, he

[1] Kalidasa's work is an exception to the truth of this statement.

fooled his countrymen in plenty. He tells with glee how Dr. Nishikanta Chatterji was awarded a German Ph.D. for a thesis on Bengali lyric poetry, in which *Bhānu Singh* was given high honour as one of the ancient glories of his land's literature. He says today that the poems could have passed as old with no one who really knew the older Bengali poetry. The verses echo the conventional themes and style, flutes and flowers and forests, Radha lamenting Krishna's absence or neglect and the poet comforting her. Rabindranath dismisses them with scorn, as the tune of a 'hurdy-gurdy' compared with the genuine music of the real Vaisnava poems. They are better than that, however, especially two or three which were written several years later than the rest.

First Visit to England, 1877. On September 20th, 1877, he sailed for England. He returned a year later, reaching Bombay on November 4th, 1878. His stay was not a very happy experience, and he has preserved some unpleasant stories and added some unpleasanter comments, in his *Reminiscences*.[1] His prejudice against England, and things English, dispelled for only a short period following on the success of the translated *Gitānjali*, probably struck root in this visit. *Letters of a Visitor to Europe*, descriptive of his experiences, appeared in *Bhārati*. He found England as inimicable to the Muse, as English poets have found India. As Schiller has observed—and the lines apply more to poets than to most men—

> 'Cling to thy fatherland, keep hold upon it
> With all thine heart! For in this soil thy strength
> Has its firm roots, while in an alien land
> Thou art absorbed for ever, or remainest
> A shivering reed, for every wind to snap.'

Yet the English stay was not altogether fruitless. He saw snow for the first time close at hand, a magic sight anywhere; he made the discovery that human

[1] Pp. 156 seq.

nature is very like human nature everywhere; and he read the *Religio Medici* with Henry Morley, an experience whose delightfulness he mentions gratefully to this day. Also, he had talks with Loken Palit, a fellow-student, the brilliant and unfortunate friend whose abounding vigour and eager appreciativeness carried Rabindranath forward into so many poetical assays.

BEGINNINGS AND JUVENILIA CONTINUED. This brief English sojourn was hardly a break in this first literary period. Scattered over, or rather, crowded into these years were a number of writings which deserve mention, if only to show his abundance and variety. Some were before the English visit, some followed it; but all preceded his twenty-first year. The prose was, on the whole, more noteworthy than the verse. His *Letters of a Visitor to Europe*, already mentioned, are fresh and free from pose. They are still procurable. He has always been a first-rate letter-writer, whether in public or private correspondence. Then there was a famous assault on Michael Dutt's *Meghnādbodh*. The poet smiles over this today, and expresses remorse. Yet it is vigorous and acute, and at the time when it appeared attracted much notice. The poet has always been the most independent critic of literature in Bengal, and one of the very few whose opinions have reason behind them.

Then there was a very early novel, *Karunā—Pity*. There was *Rudrachandra*, a blank verse tragedy. Young poets revel in gloom, and in these years the young Rabindranath took the mournful view of life which is usual at such an age. The drama, says Mr. Mahalanobis, 'is very melodramatic, with a stern father, a poet as lover, and the inevitable Ophelia-like Amiya. Both father and daughter die in the last scene, leaving the poet lamenting.' This poetic gloom is summed and massed in *Bhagna-Hridaya—The Broken Heart*. This was a lyrical drama, very popular at the time. Its songs and a few lyrical passages he has preserved in his *Juvenilia*. Of this poem he wrote, thirteen years

NATIONAL ARCHIVES FOR INDIA

later,[1] in language which recalls Keats's famous distinction between the imagination of a boy and that of a man, with his remarks on the imagination of the period between:[2] 'When I began to write *Bhagna-Hridaya*, I was eighteen—neither in my childhood nor my youth. This borderland age is not illumined with the direct rays of Truth; its reflection is seen here and there, and the rest is shadow. And like twilight shades its imaginings are long-drawn and vague, making the real world seem like a world of phantasy. The curious part of it is that not only was I eighteen, but everyone around me seemed to be eighteen likewise; and we all flitted about in the same baseless, substanceless world of imagination, where even the most intense joys and sorrows seemed like the joys and sorrows of dreamland. There being nothing to weigh them against, the trivial did duty for the great.' He adds, 'This period of my life, from the age of fifteen or sixteen to twenty-two or twenty-three, was one of utter disorderliness.'

Period of Intellectual Ferment and Literary Experiment (1881-87). With *Evening Songs*, it became clear that he was a poet, and a new and true one. Yet it cannot be said that they were remarkable, taken on their absolute merits. One can say of *Queen Mab* that it contained the prophecy of genius, but not that it had any permanent worth. Something more can be said of *Evening Songs*, and much more of the two or three best pieces; but the group as a whole cloys with sameness of thought and epithet. Its great achievement is atmosphere; and the poems are free, straying and feeling after a metrical liberty undreamed of as yet in Bengali literature.

Evening Songs are almost more remarkable for the swiftness and completeness with which they were overpassed, than for their own merits, merits real enough but entangled in a jungle of subjectivity and

[1] *My Reminiscences* (translation, p. 179).
[2] Preface to *Endymion*.

hidden and choked by monotony of style. A break in this mood was provided by two musical comedies, *Bālmiki Pratibhā—The Genius of Valmiki*—and *Kāl Mrigayā—The Fateful Hunt.* Music is in his blood, and Rabindranath has always been able to lift himself by its wings out of depression or morbid concern with his inward life. A famous singer in his own country, he has delighted many Western friends also by singing his own tunes, of which he has composed hundreds. I remember, when we were looking over translations together, if I asked, 'What is the Bengali for this phrase?' he would answer, 'Wait a minute,' and then, tapping the table, would sing through the poem in question till he reached the passage. He told me that once, when he was seventeen, he was speaking in a large meeting; and after his speech, the audience clamoured for a song, which he gave, straining his voice, so that (so in his modesty he alleges) it has never been right since. It is safe to say that this deterioration has been noticed by no one but himself. To his two musical comedies he gave a rapture which he tells us has never gone to the making of any other work of his. If so, it must have been rapture indeed, for no poet is more inspired, with a very fury of concentration, than he when he works, or more exhausted when the influence has ebbed. When *Bālmiki Pratibhā* was written, his house was a fountain of song, whose rejoicing centre was his brother Jyotirindra. Rabindranath, with his characteristic feeling after and annexation of whatever was useful to him, mingled Western tunes, from Moore's *Irish Melodies*, with Indian. The poem shows traces of the influence of English folklore. Its robbers are very like Robin Hood's band and it has a chorus of woodnymphs who are very like English fairies. Some of the songs remain popular.

From *Sandhyā Sangit—Evening Songs*—we pass naturally to *Prabhāt Sangit—Morning Songs.* The two books are usually coupled together. But I cannot understand how anyone can fail to see the immense advance represented by the latter and only slightly later book

advance in technique, in firmness of treatment, in objectivity, and in healthiness of tone and atmosphere. Ajitkumar Chakrabarti, the best of Rabindranath's critics, saw this, and always insisted that *Morning Songs* was one of his key-books, an epitome and microcosm of his later work. A shorter book than the *Evening Songs*, it has more variety.

In a style new and immediately popular, he wrote his *Bibidha Prasanga*, or *Various Topics*. In these, the subject is of scant importance, the matter existing for the manner's sake. It is the young tiger sharpening his claws on the bark of any trees that took his fancy; and beautifully scarred the trees are, by the keenest of claws. The first novel which he cares to acknowledge, *Bauṭhākurānir Hāṭ*, belongs to this period. More important than any outward manifestation of it was the inward illumination which pierced through his world at this time, reaching him in a drab corner of Calcutta and flooding his mind with a happiness which has never wholly ebbed and has known many periods of renewal. His body, no less than his mind, travelled now, and his environment changed. He sojourned at Karwar, on the Western coast, in 1883, where he steeped his mind in the vast, spreading landscapes so beloved by him, the sandy beach and winding estuary of the Kalanadi River. In December of this year, he married.

The Double Aim of His Art. Even thus early, the double aim of his art had manifested itself—to get into touch with the vast world, in all its endless moods and expressions, and to escape from it. From first to last, his poetry has been the faithful transcript of his soul. Hence, when his mind has been confused and muddied, his poetry has been clouded and clogged. And when his mind has attained to serenity, either in clear vision of life outside or sitting aloof from the world-pageant, he has achieved that poise and calm for which he is best known in the West. His earliest poetry represented rather that side of him which sought escape and evasion than the wandering pilgrim-side. Therefore, in the

collection of his works edited by Babu Mohitchandra Sen,[1] his first poems are entitled *Heart-Wilderness*, and *Prabhāt Sangit* is placed in a section called *Emergence*. But now, in his Karwar stay this *Emergence* phase became what it was to remain for twenty years, the ruling mood of his activity. He wrote *Nature's Revenge*, the first of his non-symbolical plays. This has been englished as *Sanyāsi*, and the reader can see how remarkable it is. On his return to Calcutta, he wrote *Pictures and Songs*, a series of lyrics sufficiently characterised by their title. These are more objective, than any previous lyrics. 'Whatever my eyes fell upon found a response within me.'[2] He had drawn closer to the stirring life without, though he had drawn closer as spectator only. From his Jorasanko home he watched incessantly and with deepening sympathy the life of that jungle of poor huts before his door. He is still entangled in his mannerisms; but the technique is growing firmer with every book, and this book contains some very vivid effects and impressions. *Nalini*, a short prose drama, followed. This is no longer in print, and its theme, 'a tragedy of errors,'[3] has been more mercifully worked out in *Māyār Khelā*. Nalini, the heroine, is in love with Nirad, but hides the fact. Disappointed, Nirad marries Nirajā half in pique. The latter, learning the story, dies, possibly by suicide, and attempts in dying to reconcile her husband and his first and real love. But Nalini refuses reconciliation, announcing that she will soon join Nirajā. In *Māyār Khelā*, the heroine coquettishly sends away her lover, but afterwards repents in vain, for he has returned to a former forsaken love.

LITERARY EXPERIMENT AND EFFORT IN MANY KINDS. These were days of extraordinary busyness and happiness. He was writing and speaking constantly. Prose and verse came alike with ease and abundance.

[1] This edition groups poems regardless of chronology. It is useless to the serious student.

[2] *My Reminiscences* (translation, p. 242).

[3] Mr. Prasanta Mahalanobis.

Ālōchanā—Discussions—miscellaneous essays, chiefly critical, was like nothing in Bengali hitherto. Rabindranath is a subtle critic, especially on the side of form. His criticisms are impressionist, as those of poets often are, but they frequently lay bare by a flashing stroke deep-buried truth which the professional critic misses, with all his careful search and adequate equipment—as the casual Bedouin may find an incription worth all that the whole effort of the archæological survey party and their elaborately furnished camp has unearthed. But he has hardly taken his critical work seriously. *Rājarshi—The Saint-King*—is a novel of this time, afterwards used as the basis of his greatest drama, *Bisarjan* (*Sacrifice*). *Māyār Khelā —The Play of Illusion*—a musical drama, shewed his genius feeling out again in the directions it had taken in *Bālmiki Pratibhā*. It is hard to say whether his genius runs more naturally to music or to verse. Many of his songs owe their popularity to their tunes at least as much as to their words; and in many cases words and tune are inseparable. *Māyār Khelā* added to the number of his popular songs. Like *Bālmiki Pratibhā*, it has a chorus of fairies, called 'Maids of Illusion.'[1] *Samālōchanā*, a second volume of prose miscellanies, was published. He made many disconnected raids into public life and social politics, wrote and spoke on educational questions. Altogether, he was considerably the most important figure among the younger literary men. His activities drew him first into comradeship and co-operation with Bankimchandra Chatterji, the novelist, and then, when Bankim's reactionary religious views became pronounced and aggressive, into conflict with him. More than once, Rabindranath found himself and his words the centre of sharp controversy, notably after a lecture on *Hindu Marriage* in 1887. And, to crown this period of work, his first great burst of activity before he attained maturity of thought and expression, he published *Kari ō Kōmal—Sharps and Flats*. This book, with *Pictures*

[1] Shall we say 'Mist-Maidens'?

and Songs, represents the high-water mark of his early lyrical achievement. Ajit Chakrabarti's distinction may be admitted, that *Pictures and Songs* have more imagination (? fancy)[1] and *Sharps and Flats* more emotion. *Sharps and Flats* contains some of his best poems, or, at least, poems only just below his best. *Pictures and Songs*, as its title suggests, has his double characteristics: his melody, and his gift of landscape (not forgetting human figures). In these landscapes there is already present his quality of wonderful repose; but the pictures are disjoined and fragmentary. There are far greater things in *Sharps and Flats*, especially a group of splendid sonnets. This form he was to use with great success for the next four or five years, after which he abandoned it for an easy-flowing form, of seven rhymed couplets, the Muse in slippers. On the whole, he has written the rhymed couplet better than any other metre, and this particular modification of it is one he falls back on for expression of odd moments of observation or feeling. With these sonnets were others, more or less amatory and dedicated to glorification of woman's physical charm. These are flawed by conceits, often of the most extravagant kind. Bengali opinion had never condemned these; indeed, does not condemn them to this day. Michael's work, as well as that of older poets, is a mangrove-swamp of conceits—'silly even in the Bengali,' as Mr. Mahalanobis remarks, 'whereas Rabi does not sound so silly in the Bengali as he does in English.' The puerilities of the worst Elizabethan verse did not sound silly to the writer's contemporaries. But, though these sonnets did not horrify on literary grounds, they did on moral ones, and won for Rabindranath a quite unjustified reputation as daring and wicked. This reputation he enhanced in *Chitrāngadā*, before flinging all excuses for it behind him for ever.

FIRST PERIOD OF MATURITY: PURELY LITERARY PERIOD (1887-95). *Pictures and Songs* and *Sharps and*

[1] The Bengali word is used to mean both *fancy* and *imagination*.

Flats make up together Mohit Babu's *Dream of Youth.* That *Dream* has never quite left the poet; and it was to throw glamorous wings about his wonderful years of manhood. He now tried to put his dream into concrete experiment. He went to Ghazipur, famed for its roses, and here he lived the poetic life, shut in with flowery thickets. Here he wrote most of *Mānasi*, the book with which his genius definitely attains maturity, both in power over rhythm and thought. The verse is compact. After this, when he searches for form, it is not because he is not form's master. He experiments to enlarge the range of his instrument and not because he fumbles with it within its present range. There are poems in *Mānasi—The Mind's Embodiment*, or *Expression*—which explain why the Ghazipur sojourn finished. There is the group of poems which savagely satirise his countrymen, the 'rice-eating, milk-drinking tribe of Bengalis.'[1] From his rose-bowers, the poet was watching with the angriest scorn the bigotry and brag and variegated folly of the Neo-Hindu movement. One of the poems, *Dharma-Prachār—Preaching of Religion*—is at once a lofty and generous tribute to a Salvationist missionary who was brutally assaulted, and a scorching arraignment of his assailants. Other poems pour the fiercest contempt on the 'Aryan' boasting which arrogated to the Bengalis of the present all the virtues, real and imaginary, of the Indian heroic age, while it left them complacent regarding the cruelties sanctioned by social rules. Other poems, again, make a frontal attack on those social rules, and especially on the abominations of child-marriage of girls. It is no wonder that a poet so militant amid his roses should have soon sallied out from their shelter. *Mānasi* shows, too, the virile influence of Browning, who had succeeded Shelley as the chief English influence on the poet.

Mānasi brings us down to the year 1890. The same period of detachment from the world produced *King*

[1] *Duranta Āshā.*

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF INDIA

and Queen, one of the best of this first group of dramas, those in which the symbolism is subordinate to the action. In this play, Bikrām's selfish love and its fate are a reflection of the poet's own conclusions from experience. Man can be freed from the serpent-coils of such a love by sorrow, and by sorrow alone. These two works, the lyrical and the dramatic, are the real *Emergence* in the story of Rabindranath's work. For his entry upon the world of ordinary men, an entry so long delayed, till now he was on the threshold of his thirtieth year, was at hand. Leaving Ghazipur, he determined to travel across India in a bullock-cart, on the Grand Trunk road, to Peshawur, 'eating vastness,' to quote Ajit Babu.[1] He would be a spectator of life's pilgrimage, using watchful eyes. But the *Maharshi*, who saw most things that happened in his family, now intervened with the suggestion that his son should go to Shileida and manage the family estates. At first, observes Ajit Babu drily,[2] 'the poet was just a little afraid at the name of *Work*, but at last he consented.'

But first he paid a second brief visit to England, chronicled in his *Diary of a Journey to Europe*. He travelled on the Continent, and studied German and European music.

AT SHILEIDA: THE SĀDHANĀ PERIOD. He was now thirty. At Shileida he spent the most prolific period of his amazingly prolific career. The next five years might be called the *Sādhanā*[3] period, from their close connection with the magazine of that name, 'incomparably the best periodical Bengal has known.'[4] This succeeded to *Bhārati*, and has itself been succeeded by other magazines. Each new phase of activity, literary or political, has seen the poet expressing himself through a new medium, as if new thoughts required

[1] *Rabindranath*, p. 31. Ajit Babu quotes the phrase from *Duranta Āshā*.

[2] *Rabindranath*, p. 31.

[3] *Meditation*. The *Sādhanā* magazine must be distinguished from the book of English lectures entitled *Sādhanā*.

[4] Mr. Prasanta Mahalanobis.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

a new dress. Years have made no tax on his readiness to adopt new ideas, on his boyish willingness to start new movements or societies. Today, we hear of a scheme to start an International University, just as 1917, several years before the non-co-operation movement began to look about for an indigenous scheme of education, saw him eagerly arranging for a Bengali *Home University Library*. A great part of *Sādhanā* he wrote himself. One striking feature of the magazine was its eager interest in the latest science of every kind. This interest has always been an outstanding characteristic of the poet. But 'the Skibereen Eagle had its eye on' other matters as well. Rabindranath's *Diary of the Five Elements* provided a criticism of life, of remarkable charm and philosophical insight. Miscellaneous articles gave full play to his powers of vivacious journalism. He smacked at society and at tradition. Important political writings belong to these incisive pages. Most of all, he enlarged upon the meanness and mendicancy of always petitioning Government—a foreign Government—for things wanted. Much of what is most independent, and not a little of what the authorities have found most troublesome, in recent Indian political thought, owes its spring to Rabindranath's teaching. He is the parent of many movements which today he disowns.

JOY IN NATURE. Yet this crowded time was one of the deepest and most joyous communion with Nature. The family estates are not very widely scattered, yet sufficiently so to entail a good deal of travelling by boat. The chief, indeed almost the only feature of the landscape is the Padma, or Ganges. On its breast he spent wonderful days, and these leisurely hours built up the tranquillity of his later years. He is rarely happy in his landscapes till he has added a river to them. In the hunted years of his world-fame, when notoriety became too much for him, he has many a time fled to his 'ducks and reedbeds,' as he once put it in a rejoicing letter to me.

IN CONTACT WITH THE PEOPLE. At Shileida he came into intimate touch with the people at last. No

man ever had less of class-feeling; in this, as in many features of his poetry, he has resembled Shelley. Both aristocrats by birth, both have never accepted their heritage of social superiority. Now at Shileida the poet showed himself a good business man, and the *zemindari* prospered in his charge. He has always taken the keenest interest in agricultural improvement, and many new methods of farming have been introduced by him. In later years, his son Rathindranath was educated in the United States, the country which, in his father's opinion, gives the best training in practical science.

Torn Letters,[1] a delightful correspondence, gives a close picture of these dreamily wideawake years, with their leisurely busyness. In them we can trace the genesis of many, if not most, of his short stories; in them is many a beautiful sketch of life or landscape. Of the peaceful beauty of his mood in these days, the following passage gives a picture:

'I have an old acquaintance now with Evening on the Padma. When I came here in winter, and used to be late in returning from office, I had my boat moored to the sandbanks of the further side. I used to cross the silent river in a little fishing-skiff. This *Evening* waited for me with grave kindliness. A peace, a goodwill, a rest were ready for me throughout the whole sky. This silence and darkness on the waveless Padma in the evening seemed like a room in the inner apartments. My mind is one of Nature's household here, and her near kin—I have an intimate relationship which no one but myself knows. No one will understand how real it is, however I express it. The deepest part of life, which is always silent and always hidden, gently stealing out here in the unveiled evening and unveiled noon, walks with silent fearlessness. . . . We have two lives, one in this world of men, and the other in the world of feeling. I have written many

[1] A part-translation is published as *Glimpses of Bengal*. For the translation of the quoted passage here I am responsible.

pages of the story of my life in that world of feeling, in the sky above the Padma.'[1]

These *Letters* reveal his ever-stirring sympathy with the toilers. Towards them his attitude is never tinged even with mockery, far less contempt, while he rarely presents the more pretentious society of his land without a touch of bitterness or of scorn. Something of his pity and love for children was called out by the helplessness and simplicity of the *rāyats*, who scrape their fields and look up for rain, perishing uncomplainingly if it does not come. Against this background of the broad, laden river, of humble lives, of stretching, solitary spaces, we see the loftiest and most fastidious mind in India, watching with infinite kindliness. His own loneliness is brought out in the *Letters*, with undeliberate but sometimes startling clearness. I have used the word 'fastidious.' We find him passing over such universally accepted writers as Milton, without a word to suggest that their work meant anything to him, while he expresses his delight in Amiel's *Journal*. I have mentioned the joy with which, on his first visit to England, he read the *Religio Medici* with Henry Morley; and I have two enthusiastic letters lyrical in their thanks for the gift of William Canton's *Child's Book of Saints* and *W.V. Her Book*. It is these quieter, more intimate books that he has loved best.

Short Stories. These *Torn Letters* contain many passages of the best prose that he ever wrote. But the period of their composition saw a swift succession of prose and verse, often of the highest merit. No poet has ever experienced a greater Maytide, following on the first flush of spring-blossoms. To many, this is his greatest period, and *Chitrā*, its lyrical culmination, his greatest book. *Chitrā* cannot hold this pride of place against the far stronger and deeper *Balākā* of later days. But the other opinion has justification, when we remember the time's astounding record of achievement,

[1] Quoted by Ajit Chakrabarti, with his usual gift of appositeness.

in short story, in drama, in essay and miscellaneous journalism, and in lyric. The short stories began in 1891, with the publication of *The Baby's Return* (englished as *My Lord the Baby*, a title smacking too much of journalese for such a simple, touching story). His short stories continued to appear monthly for several years. They have had boundless popularity, and boundless influence on other writers. The opinion is often pronounced that they are better than his poems, an opinion which deserves mention as bearing witness to their popularity and merit.

THE FIRST GROUP OF GREAT DRAMAS. His earlier (and greater) dramas, the non-symbolical, belong to this period. Lyric, he tells us, he wrote in spring and summer and the rains, drama in winter. Truly the Gods filled the horn of his strength to overflowing, when he could so confidently allocate separate seasons to the service of different Muses! To this rule of work, however, there was an exception, *Chitrāngadā*, a drama which was written during the songtide, and is itself an epitome of all the songs he ever sang, a glorious thing throbbing with lyrical power and beauty. This is englished as *Chitrā*, and the reader can see how masterly it is, in whole and detail. It is one of the summits of his work, unsurpassed, and unsurpassable in its kind. Immediately before *Chitrāngadā*, he had written *King and Queen*, already mentioned, and *Sacrifice*. If *Chitrāngadā*, on purely artistic grounds, must rank above these, as I think it must, it is only because in it he had no double purpose to serve, but simply followed Beauty.[1] Not that the play is without its symbolism—.

[1] Cf. Keats's famous letter to Shelley (August, 1820): 'I received a copy of the *Cenci*, as from yourself, from Hunt. There is only one part of it I am judge of—the poetry and dramatic effect, which by many spirits nowadays is considered the Mammon. A modern work, it is said, must have a purpose, which may be the God. An artist must serve Mammon; he must have "self-concentration"—selfishness, perhaps. You, I am sure, will forgive me for sincerely remarking that you might curb your magnanimity, and be more of an artist, and load every rift of your subject with ore.'

NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

for it is the shrine of the loftiest and noblest meaning—but the poet for once was so captured by the loveliness of his own imagination that he wrote a play which is sufficient in itself, apart from any purpose maintained by it. The play met with its measure of rejection, as was fitting; was scorned and abused as 'sensual,' the sort of work that might be expected from the author of the sonnets of *Sharps and Flats*. But never was Wisdom more completely justified of one of her children. The play's form is superb, his splendid farewell to blank verse. From now on, he used prose or rhymed couplet for drama, finding (to use his own words) blank verse 'not graceful enough.'

If *Chitrāngadā* is the lovelier poem, *Sacrifice* is the greater drama, indeed the greatest in Bengali literature. It is amazing that work so excellent and varied in kind should have come together. The *Sādhanā* period produced a fourth drama, *Mālini*, as wistful and beautiful as *King and Queen* and *Sacrifice*. All these dramas are vehicles of thought rather than expressions of action; and they show the poet's mind powerfully working on the subject of such things in popular Hinduism as its bloody ritual of sacrifice. The dramas show also how the poet was emancipating himself from the tangles of the solely artistic aim and life. He is a strayed Hercules trapped, as he slept, in the woodnymphs' flowery meshes, and he breaks free in showers of scattered radiance. *Chitrāngadā* shows the failure of mere physical beauty, compared with the strength that is equal to life's tasks and needs—shows its failure even as beauty, on the plane of final artistic values. *King and Queen*, as I have already said, shows how selfish love can lead only to sorrow and ruin. *Sacrifice* shows how greatly we slander Eternal Truth, when

> 'The wrong that pains our souls below
> We dare to throne above.'[1]

Mālini, that wistful and beautiful play, teaches that love and not orthodoxy worships God, and it burns like a

[1] Whittier, *The Eternal Goodness*.

slow, deep fire against bigotry. In all these plays, it is the woman who brings truth near; and often, the woman who is a mere child. It will be remembered that in the earlier *Nature's Revenge* it was by the path of love for a simple little girl that the Sanyasi, a Bengali Paracelsus, was brought home. 'The shepherd in Virgil grew at last acquainted with Love, and found him a native of the rocks.'[1] But Rabindranath's shepherds (who are mostly kings and priests) when they become acquainted with Love find him an inhabitant of their own homes, unrecognised and overlooked long.

The Curse at Farewell, dramatic in form, is a one-act phantasy. It might have been made tragic, deep, or sublime, but is none of these things. It is simply charming. After all, a poet is entitled to rest his mind sometimes, and merely amuse himself. And this poet's genius had been flowering and fruiting with the most unresting fecundity. *The Curse at Farewell* is the first appearance of a characteristic and delightful class of poems, dramatic snapshots, interviews and dialogues,—the poet's *Gods and Goddesses*, as they might be called, his counterpart of Browning's *Men and Women*.

EMERGENCE OF THE JIBANDEBATĀ DOCTRINE. After *Mānasi*, the next lyrical volume was *Sōnār Tari*, *The Boat of Gold*. This important and difficult book exposed him to a new charge, that of mysticism, which he has found harder to throw off than that other, of sensuousness. In this book, the prevailing theme is the immanence of the Universal in the common and particular. The poems are haunted by sense of the transitoriness of life. But the chief mark of *Sōnār Tari* is the emergence in it of what was to be the characteristic idea of the phase of work through which Rabindranath was now to pass,—the *jibandebatā* doctrine. *Jibandebatā* means 'Life-God.' The *jibandebatā* idea was a phase only, disappearing because through it he went on to his mystical apprehension of his Creator and Friend, God. But, while it lasted, it was important; and without some knowledge of

[1] Dr. Johnson's *Letter to Lord Chesterfield*.

the doctrine many of the poems of this period must seen the vaguest gibberish. It is partly because such poems have been translated and printed in the West, without a word of explanation of any kind, that so widespread a belief has sprung up that Rabindranath is a weaver of beautiful but meaningless words and images. The fact of the doctrine's clear emergence at this time may be mentioned here, while consideration of the doctrine is postponed.[1]

Chitrā—Beauty—is the crown of this first half of the poet's career. This is a volume of lyrics, to be carefully distinguished from the drama englished as *Chitrā*, already considered under its Bengali name of *Chitrāngadā*. *Chitrā* is flawed by his usual inequality, and by the verbal repetitions which are sown so thickly through his earlier works, a jungle which a whole lifetime of poetic effort has only gradually thinned, and has never utterly cut away But the book merits its simple, inclusive title. In no other book has he attained to more single-minded adoration and celebration of Beauty. Half-a-dozen of the poems are of the most exquisite loveliness—the poem which he has englished, with even exceptional inadequacy, as *The Gardener*, *The Farewell to Heaven*, *Evening*, *A Night of Full Moon*, *Moonlight*.[2] The greatest poem of all, *Urbasi*, is perhaps the greatest lyric in all Bengali literature, and probably the most unalloyed and perfect worship of Beauty which the world's literature contains.

Chitrā finished this first lap of his race. In its most consummate moments, he said all that he could say, out of this first period of aesthetic development. Never again was he to be sheer poet. From now on there is 'a human trouble in the hills,'[3] and all perception of beauty comes stained with reflection, often melancholy reflection. Increasingly there is an intellectual admixture, often where he should be most imaginative; and there is sometimes a very prosy admixture, hands catching at

[1] See pp. 74 seq.
[2] Translated in my *Poetry of Rabindranath Tagore*.
[3] T. E. Brown, *Epistola ad Dakyns*.

wings that would soar. Greater poetry comes, in the best moments of *Kshanikā* and especially in page after page of *Balākā*. But nothing lovelier, nothing more entirely poetical, than *Urbasi* and *The Farewell to Heaven*.

CLOSE OF EARLY LITERARY PERIOD, 1895. In 1895, *Sādhanā* ceased to be issued. The same year saw most of the poems of *Chaitāli*, the placid and beautiful sunset of this period of work. *Chaitāli* is the late rice gathered in the month of *Chaitra*. The book of this name shows the poet gathering up the 'fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.' He is gleaning in fields which have given magnificent harvest. There is an autumnal atmosphere over the book. It is one of the most prophetic things that have ever come out of the human spirit. It looks back, in a mood of tranquil reminiscence, knowing the day's work well done; and forward, with serene anticipation. It is written almost entirely in 'Rabindranath's sonnet,' that flowing, peaceful form of seven rhymed couplets. Its poems are a succession of pictures. 'The light that never was on sea or land,' the utter peace and toleration of the poet's mood, is over everything, transfiguring the commonest sights, a girl with a buffalo, a baby and a kid, a prostitute, the ferry plying between villages, folk going forth to their labour at dawn, making them all *sub specie aeternitatis*. It is good that this 'season of calm weather' was given to him, for there were stormy years awaiting him. Some tattered rag of storm-cloud from the storms he has known already occasionally drifts on even these quiet skies, as in the ferocious 'sonnets' in which he castigates his own countrymen who wear European dress. 'Mother, you have fifty million sons who are Bengalis, but you have not made them men.' Yet even this anger is for new reasons. He rages less now because of the wrongs that are indigenous, the cruelties committed by Hindu society; and more for wrongs that are imported, for imitation of the West. He is entering on his 'patriotic' period. The first collected edition of his poetry appeared in 1896.

II

LATER LIFE: MANY-SIDED ACTIVITY

PERIOD OF TRANSITION AND UNCERTAINTY (1896-1900). So *Sādhanā* ceased in 1895 ; and *Chaitāli* appeared shortly after its death. These events heralded a very great break in the poet's career, which divides it almost as sheerly into two as Milton's time as Latin Secretary broke up his. The difference is twofold.

POLITICS. First, as already indicated, the stream of his activity became muddy with politics. This was not unnatural, for politics were increasingly occupying the Bengali mind, till they became the obsession that they are today. What is strange is not that Rabindranath should have been drawn into the popular movement, but that he should have kept aloof from it so long ; and, further, that, even when in it, and exceedingly prominent in it, he should have remained so lonely and independent a figure. To understand this, we have to remember, first, how detached his life had been, how austerely aristocratic his family traditions, mixing only with the best and most eclectic in Indian thought and life ; and, secondly, with what a sense of the *Real* he was gifted. His attitude has always puzzled both his countrymen and the Government. Just as once an incredibly silly official proscribed as 'seditious' *Dharma-Prachār*, that throbbing protest against his own countrymen's bigotry and cowardice, and generous recognition of the courage and selflessness of foreigners whom he considered mistaken, so Bengalis, especially the 'patriotic' party, have complained that he criticises even when taking their side. One of the silliest of the many silly catchwords that are today devastating Indian

NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

thought is the one that 'solidarity is essential' and that it is treason to criticise what your own party thinks. Criticism must wait, like a thousand other good things, till *Swarāj* is obtained. You must postpone a visit to the doctor, no matter how ill you are, till you have a brand-new coat to go in. Rabindranath has never accepted this, or any other catchword. Nevertheless, I am bound to say that I think his *real* sense suffered a temporary eclipse, during the decade after *Chaitāli*, and that it has had phases of obscurity from time to time ever since.

CHANGE IN RELIGIOUS ATTITUDE. The second new element now entering his work is religious. Hitherto, he had been an artist for Art's sake. His religion had been a sense of oneness with the Universe, such a religion as is common with literary men, the religion we find in Richard Jefferies's *Story of My Heart*. In a letter, he expressly said that he understood no dogma save the joy and love which are in the Universe. Incidentally, it may be remarked that this is almost the most tremendous dogma possible. Believing this, convinced of this, a man might well rest happy. But Rabindranath did not rest happy. There was too much of the puritan in his blood. In his household was the austere presence of his father, was the tradition of Rammohan Ray's courage and stern battle with ignorance and evil. Ajitkumar Chakrabarti's comments[1] on the change which came to him are interesting. He suggests that the exhaustion which follows on creative activity shows that Art can never take the place of spiritual life. So (he says) Rabindranath passed away from his early mood and effort, because Art did not satisfy him. This is true enough; and to this day the poet's life shows this conflict, this restlessness. The aesthete is in his blood, and he can never repress his delight in form. But the preacher is there, too. Ajit Babu adds another reason[1] for the writer of *Urbasi* and the short stories becoming the author of *Gitānjali* and of the many prose

[1] *Rabindranath*, pp. 55 seq.

NATIONAL BOOK TRUST OF INDIA

pamphlets and lectures with which he has enlightened those of his countrymen and of the West who felt inclined to listen. This is, that the narrowness of his field of work was brought home to him. There was a very petty side to the *zemindāri* work at Shileida. The *rāyats* were picturesque, and patient enough, and had merits which won the poet's abiding respect and love in a measure which he never gave to his own class. But they also cadged considerably, and probably had some of the obstinacy, as well as the charming stupidity, of the buffaloes which they tended so ably. And the *zemindāri* work meant listening to interminable and foolish stories, meant gathering and remitting rents, meant trying to get crass conservatism to adopt better methods of farming. Perhaps all first-class work has had a background of drudgery, and neither in his character nor in the quality of his artistic achievement has the poet lost by his Shileidā years.[1] But it is not strange that he should have wanted a wider field of effort.

BENGALI LIFE VERY NARROW. In his country, at best, all effort is pitifully restricted. A nation without a living tradition of history, in subjection for nearly a millennium, and before that with warring and petty kings—a nation tied hand and foot by restrictions which the needs of the new time imperiously demand should be broken—in such a nation how can a poet become great or universal? It is great part of the reason for Rabindranath having achieved this impossibility, having become both great and universal, that he recognised, as no other did, the sheer necessity of his people finding a larger life, a broader, freer universe of discourse. After *Sādhanā*, it is his incessant effort to find this life for them, to break fetters and shatter narrowness. Even before this, the short stories were, many of them, tracts for the times, embodying truth sometimes obvious and poignant, but sometimes truth

[1] Drudgery is far too strong a term, of course, for his Shileida work.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES INDIA

which his own generation missed, though a later cannot miss it, for

> 'Wise poets, that wrapt Truth in tales,
> Knew her themselves through all their veils.'[1]

And what he knew, and hid in three measures of allegory or incident, others will know hereafter. Further, *Sādhanā* itself, in its immense scope of interest, had represented a very definite attempt to enlarge his country's range. While others were talking, he had been trying to build. He now came out into public life more and more. His attitude towards conferences and congresses had been one of contempt. They were mendicant institutions, begging and petitioning. Worst of all, they were imitative, copying the West instead of taking native models. Nevertheless, though he despised congresses and places where men talk, he rapidly made his way to the front as an extraordinarily effective speaker. He lectured and wrote very busily, especially on political and educational matters. At his best he can hold an audience as very few men alive. One long piece, *The River*, almost exhausts the poetical activity of the two years following the finish of *Sādhanā*. But he delivered a course of lectures on literature, in connection with the newly-formed National Council, lectures republished as *Sāhitya*.

Rabindranath's Mind Turns Back to the Past. Characteristically, it was through his imagination that he made his approach to politics. His disillusionment with the present turned his mind to the past. He turned to its heroic stories, to its noble ideals of service and meditation. If he idealised it, that was a natural mistake and one which everyone was making. The stories to which he turned were not Bengali ones, but chiefly Sikh and Mahratta. Rabindranath has been a pioneer in every way, the first among his countrymen in so many fields of thought, that in considering his achievement the most watchful sobriety and critical

[1] Thomas Carew, *Ingrateful Beauty Threatened*. He writes '*her* veils.'

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

detachment have to be maintained, lest admiration and amazement lead to over-praise. Sometimes one feels that there never was such a man, for vitality and range. Between 1897 and 1900 he published four important books of verse, *Kalpanā*, *Kathā*, *Kāhini*, *Kshanikā*. This is the time of the 'Five K's': for there was a fifth, *Kanikā* (1899), 'Chips from a Poet's Workshop.' *Kshanikā* is the lightest of all his books in tone. As Ajit Babu observes, everything[1] is tossed on waves of gaiety. It is a most important book. In it, for the first time, he raids the colloquial language seriously. He adopted the *hasanta*, or power of sharply truncating a word by dropping a last syllable which was a vowel one only,—a shocking innovation, and one which cut the *pandits* to the heart. Those excellent men have always interested Rabindranath. They make very frequent appearances in his work; and, as when Matthew Arnold introduces bishops,[2] one is always delightedly certain that they are going to make fools of themselves. I have letters from him imploring me to grant him one favour, that I will not read his verse with any *pandit*. His Bengali *Gitānjali* I once showed to my old head *pandit* at the high school, a man of great Sanskrit learning. He ramped about the school like a leopard with an arrow in his side. The Bengali was so shockingly bad! He was seventy-five years of age, but his voice was tremulous not with age but with anger. The second *pandit*, a much younger man, said that the poems '*bhāla lāge nā*' ('do not taste well'), and he too complained of the exceeding badness of the diction. My masters were unanimous in the same charge. The headmaster, a sensible man, has frequently assured me that there can be no comparison between Michael Dutt and Rabindranath. The elder poet, he says, is immeasurably the greater, especially in point of style, his style being faultless and superb. Waiting once on a railway station, I began showing the *Gitānjali*, side by side with the Eng-

[1] Not quite everything. The later pieces are wistful.
[2] See Mr. Birrell's *Matthew Arnold* (*Obiter Dicta*).

lish translation, to some students. Immediately, a crowd gathered, intensely curious, and read poem after poem. There was one mind among them; the thoughts were high, certainly, but the diction was mean and bad. And *Gitānjali* represents a late stage in the war between Rabindranath and the *pandits*. That war became acute with the publication of *Kshanikā*. The *pandits* raised a howl of sorrow. They are howling still. *Kshanikā* definitely represents the turning-point in his tide of popularity. One is puzzled what to say about such an essay as Mr. Yeats's famous introduction to the English *Gitānjali*. That introduction is most eloquent and movingly written. But a vein of misconception runs through it, from time to time outcropping to the surface in definite misstatements. Mr. Yeats's name carries so much authority that the wrong perspective of his essay has done as much as anything, even Mr. Rhys's book,[1] towards the misunderstanding of Rabindranath in the West. Mr. Yeats had no suspicion of the sharp division of opinion as to Rabindranath, and of the intense dislike with which his name is regarded by many of his countrymen. He writes, 'If the civilisation of Bengal remains unbroken, if that common mind which—as one divines—runs through all, is not, as with us, broken into a dozen minds that know nothing of each other. . .' But this unbroken unity of Eastern minds is become an imaginary thing. In so far as it is not imaginary, it is artificial and superficial, the result of society's pressure upon the individual. If an agreement so produced existed in England or Ireland, Mr. Yeats would not think it praiseworthy. Praiseworthy or not, it does not exist. As to Rabindranath, 'my Indians,' as Mr. Yeats confidingly calls them, the handful of Bengalis domiciled in London, pardonably forgot that they represented only a section of opinion in much that they said. From their statements Mr. Yeats built up the conception of a rejoicing Bengal acclaiming its universal voice. The

[1] *Rabindranath Tagore* (Macmillans).

conception is a majestic one, and it has gone abroad and won such acceptance that it seems hardly worth while trying to show its falsity. Yet false it is. No man ever had such enthusiastic disciples and friends as Rabindranath, but no man has ploughed his way through such a cloud of detraction. From the publication of *Kshanika*, the enthusiasm and the detraction have both been intensified. That book was a watershed, sending men's opinion definitely streaming to the side of freedom and progress or the side of tradition and stagnation. The title means 'What is Momentary,' and it expresses its modesty of scope and purpose. In these poems, he beguiled his heart-ache and misgiving, masking his mourning with laughter. Ajit Babu speaks of a spirit of 'mockery of his own pain,' and complains that it is hard to tell when he is serious. The poet's graver compatriots were deeply offended. He had danced his reputation away. But Hippocleides didn't care. He had learned to trust his *jibandebatā*, knowing well by now that he was never less in danger of mistakes than when he trusted his instincts. He was looking far ahead, to a time when neither *pandits* nor popular patriotic dramatists would matter. He never went back, either in style or manner, despite his critics. No man can jest in Sanskrit. But the use of *hashanta* gave the voice and the rhythm something to break against. 'Obstructed by the pebbles of *hashanta*, the tune ripples.'[1] This is his style today. As to the charge that he was not in earnest, that charge was made by the same men who had found *Chitrāngadā* obscene. If he played for a space, between the two great activities, that of his earlier worship of Beauty and the one, about to begin, of worship of God, it is not because his mind was shallow. His irony rarely sleeps; and it was the element of sanity here, even when he glorified Ancient India most extravagantly. He had done with his old life, and was depressed with the knowledge that there were no more *Urbasis* and *Chitrāngadās* for him. But

[1] *Rabindranath*, p. 69 (Ajitkumar Chakrabarti).

he laughed at his loss. He was disheartened by Modern India, its noise and brag, and so he wandered in distant times and regions of his land, playing in a beautiful country of his imagination. His title asserted that he was entirely satisfied with the passing and momentary—

> 'The Bird of Time has but a little way
> To fly—and lo! the Bird is on the wing.'

But the underlying spirit denied this assertion. Like Matthew Arnold, whom he resembles in so many things, in his constant irony, in his love of moonlight and of river-scenes, in his desire to save religion by making it rational, in his elegiac and reflective strain, most of all in his deep earnestness beneath playfulness and in the puritan who comes hand-in-hand with the poet, he is not least but most passionate when he pretends to abandon a struggle that is too much for him:

> 'Let the long contention cease!
> Geese are swans, and swans are geese!'[1]

or closes an ironically polite exposition of sheer folly with a hurled permission to continue to keep to it:

> '"That, or nothing, I believe!"
> "For God's sake, believe it then."'[1]

It should be added that *Kshanikā* contains village-pictures of great beauty. Many of its later pieces, especially, are of quiet grace, dealing with his beloved rains and rivers.

Flow of Verse Again (1897-1900). He had now, after temporary hesitation, launched his boat again on a full stream of poesy. Everything followed in natural evolution. *Kalpanā—Imagination*—expressed in visions of the past of India his sense of loss and his sorrow, in this transition time, before he realised that he had found a main current again. There is the same brooding dreaminess and grief as in Mr. Yeats's mourning for Deirdre dead and Maeve vanished for evermore. Many of the poems say farewell to his former self.

[1] Matthew Arnold, *The Last Word* and *Pis-Aller*.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Never was any poet such an unconscionable time in saying farewell. *Kalpanā* is full of farewelling, of ululation and the waving of hands. In *The Season's End*, a very noble poem, he says goodbye both to the tired year and to his own old poetry. The Bengali year usually closes in a brief spell of stormy weather, the period when most of the festivals are held in honour of Rudra, the terrible God. Rabindranath did not forget this. He was now more than ever, if that be possible, drawn to the rains, and to storms. Was increasingly pulled forward, also, to a stronger and more terrible life. *Baisākh*[1] uses the sombre imagery of the funeral fires and the burning-ground. So far, as Ajit Babu points out, his patriotism had not taken a much more definite form than a general desire that his countrymen should walk in worthy ways. This mingled with a general sadness at parting from his own secluded life. *Kalpanā* is one of his more important books, and of great poetical merit. *Kathā—Stories*—and *Kāhini—Tales*—are a series of simple narrative poems, mostly of the times of the Buddha and of the Sikh and Mahratta patriotic effort, two periods of self-sacrifice and royal renunciation. The ballad-form used in *Kathā* is new in Bengali literature. *Kanikā* means the chips or sawdust of a carpenter's shop. The book consists of epigrams, many of them translated in his *Stray Birds*. These are of all sorts, some trivial or commonplace, some profound or lovely

Between 1898 and 1904, he wrote a series of dramatic dialogues, romantic in treatment and very powerful; *Sati, Narak Bās—A Sojourn in Hell,—Gāndhāri's Prayer, Karna and Kunti.*

PERIOD OF GREAT POLITICAL AND PUBLIC ACTIVITY; EDUCATIONAL EFFORT; RELIGIOUS MYSTICISM (1901-1907). An important year is 1901. It saw the revival of *Bangadarshan—The Bengal Review*—a monthly, of which he became editor. It launched him on his great period as a novelist. It was the year of the

[1] The first Bengali month, mid-April to mid-May.

foundation of his now world-famous *Āsram—Retreat*—near Bolpur. Two miles out of Bolpur, many years before, the *Maharshi* had been attracted to a small group of trees on an uplifted, bare plain. Here he came to meditate, and round this nucleus he and his son since have planted noble groves. Rabindranath's *Āsram* has become famous for its school. But the poet thought of more than a school when he founded it. The problem which had so long vexed him was with him as urgently as ever, that of his country's condition. His country seemed to him so broken and scattered, that the first need was to give it some centre where it might concentrate. This idea is with him today, though now it takes a wider scope, and he would found a World-University at Santiniketan, the 'Home of Peace' at Bolpur. The old ideals of Ancient India, with its schools of forest-meditation, were strongly with him, and he was dreaming of renunciation. He wanted to work for the world, yet to be withdrawn from the world. His mind has been a plain of constant conflict, as I have said already.

> 'Ah, two desires toss about
> The poet's feverish blood.
> One drives him to the world without,
> And one to solitude.'[1]

But he began with a school. Disillusioned as to what he might hope to do with his own generation, he thought of the children. India, and Bengal in particular, was afflicted with the worst system of education the British Empire knows,[2] and Rabindranath, who had escaped its talons, was its sworn foe. He wished to cut out Calcutta University altogether, and to try to found a school in harmony with national tradition, and close to Nature, where the mind might be free to expand into love of Beauty and of God. A noble conception and experiment, of which more in place.

[1] Matthew Arnold, *Stanzas in Memory of the Author of 'Obermann.'*

[2] Many Indian Universities are at present trying to remedy things, and the future is much more hopeful.

NATIONAL BOOKS OF INDIA

FINDS HIMSELF AS NOVELIST. In this period, between 1901 and 1907, he became a serious novelist. He wrote *Gōrā*, the greatest novel in Bengali, a long story with the fulness of detail of the Russian novel. It is a study of the imaginative mind working apart from close touch with fact. He shows the new thought working in Indian society, and shows society at war with itself. *Gōrā* is the child of English parents, lost in the Sepoy Mutiny, and brought up as a Bengali. He hates Englishmen, until his supposed mother tells him that he is English. The book is a Bengali *Kim*. In 1902 he had his saddest year. It began with foreboding on his part that it was to mean separation from his wife. When she fell ill, he knew it was the end. Her death left him particularly desolate, with anxieties crowding in upon his life. He cut himself off from the world, and went to Almora, in the Himalayas. His youngest son was a baby, and one of his daughters was dying of consumption. As Ajit Babu puts it, he was both father and mother to them, in his lonely retreat among the pines. Many of the ballads in *Kathā* were composed for his boy. He wrote *Smaran*[1]—*Remembrance*—a series of poems commemorating his wife, poems of extreme pathos and beauty. In 1903 appeared Mohit Babu's edition of his poetry, in which poems of different periods were grouped according to theme or character. Another novel, *The Wreck*, followed, in which he shows how Hindu family relationships are based not on human feelings but on conventional respect and worship. In 1904, he issued a collection of his patriotic poems (in Mohit Babu's Edition), entitled *Swadesh Sankalpa*—which may be englished as *Resolution and Independence*. This volume proved very popular. Then, in 1905, came *Khēā—Crossing*—a volume of lyrics. About this time his youngest son died.

THE PARTITION AND PUBLIC EXCITEMENT. In 1905 came events which for the time being put everything else in the shade for Bengali opinion. It was the

[1] See the middle poems of *Fruit-Gathering*.

time of the Partition, and Bengal went mad, Rabindranath flung himself into the battle. In all India there was no voice more powerful than his, no pen more effective. This was the time of his mightiest prose, whose periods march and burn. There is not much political writing in English which can match his best pages of this time.

An example of his passionate eloquence may be taken from his Speech at the *Bijayā-milan*—the *Festival of Meeting Together in Victory*—the great family festival which marks the fourth day of the *Durgā Pujā*, the national holiday of Bengal. 'In the mercy of God today we understand afresh what the Meeting Together in Victory means—understand, after so many years in which we have not made worthy preparation for it. Today we understand that the Meeting Together which will give us blessing, will give us victory, will give us fearlessness, this great Meeting Together is not one in our courtyards but a Meeting Together in our land. In this Meeting Together there is not sweetness alone, there is the heat of blazing flame! It is not satisfaction alone, it gives strength!' He goes on, 'It must be borne in mind today that the nationality of our land which has risen before our vision does not depend on any favour or disfavour of a king. Whether a law be passed or not passed, whether the people of England listen to our piteous cries or do not listen, our country is our country eternally, the land of our fathers and of our sons and descendants, the giver of life to us, the giver of strength, the giver of good.' Thus, the Spirit of Freedom uses different voices in different lands, but the one message. Rabindranath wrote songs which fanned the student-world aflame. He was the pioneer in many movements. As in Shileida days he had tried to introduce better farming and co-operative societies in the villages on the Padma, so now he went round establishing national schools, forming village committees and patriotic associations. Yet all the while an inward change was working. *Kheā*, as its title indicates, symbolised a passing from one bank of the stream of activity

to another. It is his farewell, as many of its poems tell, to work, to the life of public endeavour. Ajit Babu notes as characteristic of Rabindranath, from first to last, that he should become absorbed in effort, then should turn from that particular phase for ever. Repeatedly, he says, he has become entangled in bonds and then has burst them. 'No sooner has the full tune sounded on his lyre than the strings have snapped, and he has become anxious to sound new tunes on new strings.'[1] Contact with the world of politics gradually dispelled the golden mists of his vision of Bengal struggling to become free. The movement showed itself as stained with sordid selfishness, and as a riot of noisy brag and passion. More than all, the poet was longing for completer life. It has been his never-pausing endeavour to taste life to the full, of which endeavour his verse is a faithful mirror. But from varied experience he has striven to co-ordinate a whole behind it, seeking, as the Indian mind must, to find the One in the Many. This blare and bluster and intolerance was not *Life*, any more than the Neo-Hindu puerilities had been.

> 'His life was turning, turning,
> In mazes of heat and sound,—
> But for peace his soul was yearning.—'[2]

He changed suddenly. In one day, he resigned his membership of all political committees and bodies, and fled to Santiniketan. Here he gave himself up to educational work, to meditation, to poetry. Great was the clamour of abuse which followed him. It was assumed that he had given one more proof of the instability of the poetic temperament, that he had turned from the conflict to crown his head with roses of poesy and idlesse. But his retirement remained unbroken for several years.

PERIOD OF RETIREMENT, OF EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY, AND RELIGIOUS MEDITATION AND POETRY (1907-12). He was now a marked man in official circles. Though he was not on the list of political suspects, his

[1] *Rabindranath*, p. 96. [2] Matthew Arnold, *Requiescat*.

movements were watched, and a spy was placed in his school, an honorary worker. Rabindranath discovered the latter move, and gave the gentleman permission to resign.

One might have supposed that his withdrawal to Santiniketan was the result of a natural desire for rest, after the stupendous and unremitting expenditure of nervous power. This was not so. Half-a-dozen years of amazing effort followed. In 1908, a collected edition of his prose was begun. He wrote a series of symbolical dramas. In 1908 came *Autumn-Festival*, in 1910 *Rājā* (*The King of the Dark Chamber*), in 1912 *The Post-Office*. This was the time when his religious poetry was written. *Naibedya* had come out in 1901, born out of due time. Now came, in 1909, *Gitānjali*, and seventeen small prose volumes of religious addresses entitled *Santiniketan* (1909-16). These addresses were delivered in his school. They are full of subtle thought and perfect expression.

In 1910, he showed signs of restlessness with so long seclusion from the world. He returned to it with suddenness equal to that with which he had quitted it. He came to Calcutta, and threw himself into the work of reorganizing the *Ādi*[1] Brahmo Samaj, his father's society. He convened a meeting of the three sects into which the Brahmo Samaj had split, and a new society was started. He enlisted notable helpers, among them *Pandit* Sibanath Sastri, Binayendranath Sen, and Ajitkumar Chakrabarti. He brought Kshitishmohan Sen down from Santiniketan, and made him a regular *ācharjya*[2] of the Adi Samaj. Even before this, he had made Krishnakumar Mitra occupy the Adi Brahmo Samaj *bedi*.[3] The principal cause of the original schism, nearly fifty years before, had been Keshabchandra Sen's demand that the *bedi* should be open to all castes. Now, after so long a period, non-Brahmans again preached from the pulpit of the parent Samaj. But the conservative element beat the poet. After some

[1] *Ādi* means *primitive, original.* [2] Minister. [3] Platform.

months of intense propaganda, he threw up the useless effort and went back to Santiniketan.[1]

PERIOD OF WORLD-WIDE FAME AND GROWING UNPOPULARITY IN BENGAL. For more than a year, he did not stir out of Bolpur. When he again emerged, it was from more than Bolpur. It was from his reputation in a province to world-wide fame. From time to time strangers had found him out in his *āsram*, thanks to a reputation which could not be altogether confined by a difficult vernacular. The poet made a third visit to England. What ensued is known to the whole world. He brought with him translations of his own later verses, which moved Mr. Yeats in the way in which he has told us, in memorable words. Other English poets were equally enthusiastic. The India Society issued to its members, in a delightful edition, the English *Gitānjali*, with Mr. Rothenstein's noble portrait. The same society issued *Chitrā*, a translation of *Chitrāngadā*. Messrs. Macmillans took over the issue of his books, and a splendid success followed. Not since Fitzgerald's *Omar Khayyam* won its vogue has any Eastern poetry had such acceptance. His fame spread over America and Europe. The poet's character endured some of the severest tests that had come his way. Homage and praise were showered on him. The same enthusiasm followed him on his return to India. 'It was roses, roses, all the way, With myrtle mixed in my path like mad.' His own countrymen awoke to his greatness. Even Calcutta University became aware of him. A few years previously, when some one had wittily suggested that a suitable way of honouring him was to have him appointed as one of the examiners in Bengali for the Calcutta Matriculation, vernacular papers had protested, on the straightforward ground that he wrote bad Bengali. It had become a not uncommon practice in examinations for passages to be set from his works, with the injunction, 'Rewrite in chaste Bengali.' Sir Asutosh Mukherji, the all-powerful Vice-Chancellor of the University, told me

[1] For these details, I am indebted to Mr. Prasanta Mahalanobis.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

that when he proposed, less than half-a-dozen years before the Nobel Prize award, that Rabindranath be made a Doctor of Literature, the Senate objected, for 'he was not a Bengali scholar.' However, in 1913, Rabindranath was crowned before the whole world with the Nobel Prize for Literature. Calcutta University sublimely followed, with a Doctorate, which the poet demurely accepted. Recollection of this last and most unexpected honour has cheered him in many dark moments. A knighthood came in 1914. But this rush of success embarrassed as much as it cheered. I was his guest when the wire came announcing the Nobel award, and I can testify that its first effect was depression. 'I shall never have any peace again,' was his cry. It was a night of wild excitement without, the Santiniketan boys parading the grounds singing, the masters as excited as they. But within, the poet was troubled with misgiving for the future. We talked of other things, then wandered into the moonlight. Next morning, no trace was visible of his fears, but they remained, and were swiftly realised. Requests poured in for introductions to books, all sorts of books. Speaking from impression only, I should say that the poet refused none of these. This was the first mistake, one which soon made his introductions as well-known and little-heeded as those of certain English men of letters. Begging letters poured in, and requests for autographs. Strangers hunted him. I remember once calling on him in Calcutta just after visitors had represented themselves as the Governor of an American State and his party. Rabindranath had answered a number of remarkably frank questions, when he discovered that he was being 'interviewed' for a newspaper. Some of the letters he received were unreasonable, some insulting. One lady wrote that she understood that the English of *Gitanjali* was by Mr. C. F. Andrews. Would Rabindranath kindly send his own autograph, and give her Mr. Andrews's address, that she might obtain his autograph also, and thus have the signature of 'both authors' in her copy of *Gitanjali*? As he observed, 'On the title-page it says,

Translated by the Author. Isn't that good enough for them?'

HIS ENGLISH. Since this last doubt is one which gives him especial annoyance, I may as well say something about his English here. About the time of the lady's tactful request, a very highly-placed English official in India had sneered in public at *Gītānjali*, expressing a wish to know what Englishman had written it. Now this kind of insult not only questions the poet's good faith, but it shows the speaker incapable of judging English. Examination of Rabindranath's English soon shows that it is by no means perfect grammatically. It contains sentences which no educated Englishman would have written, sentences marked by little, subtle errors. There are others who could bear testimony that his English is absolutely his own, but I will speak out of what I know, having seen some hundreds of his translated poems before publication. He writes English of extreme beauty and flexibility, but with mistakes that can be brought under two or three heads. First, he is not quite at home with the articles. Secondly, he does not use prepositions as an Englishman would. Thirdly, he sometimes has an unnecessary word where clauses meet, which makes the rhythm sag, like cloth with a stone in it. Add to this an occasional misuse of idiom, as 'I took my shelter,' where English says 'I took shelter,' and you have the whole of his slips. These things are but the tacks and nails of language. The beauty and music are all his own. It is one of the most surprising things in the world's literature that such a mastery over an alien tongue ever came to any man. Conrad conquered our language more completely; but he began to attack it in his teens, whereas Rabindranath was over fifty 'before I began my courtship of your tongue.'[1]

UNIVERSALLY KNOWN AND MISUNDERSTOOD: HIS TRANSLATIONS. He was now established as a poet recognised universally. A cult of his work sprang up.

[1] In a letter to me.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

His lectures were eagerly heard, he made friendships in England, the Continent was interested. To the Continent his work came necessarily at third-hand, translated from the English translation. But this did not diminish the keenness with which it was read, especially in France, Germany, Holland, and the Scandinavian countries. Perhaps his fame was greatest of all in America. Yet his real reputation began to decline, almost as soon as it reached its height. This is a cause of much bitterness to his Indian friends, who assert that it is one more proof that the materialistic West is not competent to appreciate the spiritual depth and splendour of the East. I venture to challenge this conclusion. Rabindranath's loss of reputation to me is a distressing thing, yet I think the poet himself and his publishers almost entirely to blame. Very grave mistakes were made. *Gitānjali* was a selling proposition, as it deserved to be. So book after book was hurried out, almost fortuitously, and flung at the public. After *Gitānjali* came *The Gardener*, a selection from his earlier books. This gave pleasure to many. But the word had gone round that he was a 'mystic.' Mysticism was the current catchword in the circles that think they make and understand literature, and the most unexpected people were talking of it. 'We mystics,' said the journalist and the popular novelist. I remember finding the poet, just after the publication of *The Gardener*, more vexed than pleased at an enthusiastic letter of praise from a distinguished English lady writer. 'You know, she insists on seeing mysticism in all I write.' *The Crescent Moon* followed, and then the English *Sadhana*. His fate was sealed. Let me recur to Mr. Yeats's essay. His enthusiasm is so nobly expressed that the reader rarely stops to examine what is being said. Only once does he fall below a level of lofty praise, and that is when he writes: 'These verses will not lie in little well-printed books upon ladies' tables, who turn the pages with indolent hands that they may sigh over a life without meaning, which is yet all they can know of life.' One

wonders to find so hackneyed a smartness; Bagehot said much the same about Wordsworth, and the prophecy is a stock one with reviewers. That is by the way. What is relevant is, that this fate was exactly the one which overcame the poet's work. Out in India, the rumour reached us of mobs of 'worshipping ladies,' which he had the modesty and sense to avoid. But his work could not avoid them. Such a book as *The Crescent Moon* exactly hit the taste of those who litter drawing-room tables with 'pocket R.L.S.' anthologies, and literary confectionery of all sorts, appropriately 'bound in yapp,' side by side with the box of chocolates. *Sadhana* made wild with joy the kindred type which 'simply adores whatever is so delightfully Eastern, don't you know.' Both poet and publishers continued, unwittingly, let us hope, to draw these adorers. Several books by other writers, of remarkably thin quality, appeared with forewords by him. A man gets the discredit of what he praises, no less than of what he writes. When his short stories appeared, the first volume contained only seven first-class tales out of its fourteen. *Chitra* slipped out, a slim volume hardly noted. In the next few years, more lectures came, and yet more, mostly delivered in America, some bearing signs of haste and of more care for ornamental metaphor and illustration than deep thought. The poet dug his groove deep, and kept to it. In translating, he more and more felt along one stratum only of his work, the wistful-mystical one. His boldest, strongest poems he avoided, or else watered down to prettiness. There came never a word of explanation, and his readers had not the intelligence to guess that he could not always have been this man, that there must have been change, probably had been progress, may have been retrogression. There came the mystical dramas, dramas which you were assured you could not understand unless you were very deep. By this time, most of his best readers had turned sorrowful and disappointed away, convinced that he was a bird with one note, and that that note had already been heard once in its fulness and would

only be heard in repetition and weakening henceforward. *Punch* found him very easy to parody. The reaction came. Mr. J. C. Squire[1] wrote of 'fastidious people' coming to 'the hasty conclusion that the Indian writer's reputation is founded on nothing more than a mystical bag of tricks and what has been described as a blue beard.' It is unfortunate that Mr. Squire should have selected for special opprobrium the touching poem which Rabindranath wrote for his dying child at Almora. But there is certainly nothing in the English translation to have told him what he was doing, and the passage, as it came to him, justified his assault. Rabindranath's work had gone abroad without a word of biographical explanation, without a note on *jibandebatā* or on mythological or historical allusions. The reader was left to get what he could, and, if he said 'Oh, I can't make head or tail of this, I suppose it must be nonsense or else mysticism too deep for me,' who could blame him? 'The only slightly moist bones of the translations,' said Mr. Squire, 'reveal a gentle and sensitive spirit, but very little more.' Had the poet from the first issued, in full translation, with the necessary minimum of explanation, a selection in chronological order from all his work, the verdict would have been very different. Or, after *Gitānjali's* first success, if he had given the West *Chitrāngadā*, one strong volume of short stories, then the volume containing the dramas *Sanyāsi*, *Sacrifice*, *King and Queen*, and *Mālini*, he could have waited, secure of the most careful and respectful attention for whatever he published. And he could have left prefacing other folk's rubbish alone, though this meant sacrificing his boundless good-nature on the altar of the true Muses. It should be added that his false fame in the West seemed to have infected him also, and made him tend to be like what he was believed to be. He took to inserting in his English 'translations' pretty-pretty nonsense that was not in the originals at all.

[1] In a newspaper review of Mr. Rhys's book.

And his titles, in the Bengali so splendid always, were sugared. The fine and descriptive *Kanikā* appeared in English as *Stray Birds*. So that the lover of Rabindranath who knows the original text regards the translations as something to be read for their pensive charm as poems by a different writer and with no connection with him who wrote *Balākā*. From this condemnation, which must seem sweeping, I except *Gitānjali*. This in English is, to all purposes, a new work. It is a haunted book, haunted by Rabindranath's brooding personality. He kept those first translations by him and pondered over them so long that much of himself passed into them, as into no subsequent translations. I would except also, to some extent, *Fruit-Gathering* and *Stray Birds*. I am very conscious of the many passages of subtle thought and beautiful phrasing, which occur in every one of his English books. But it is undeniable that a maddening monotony of tone and diction and a sameness of imagery placed him far lower than his true rank as poet. As regards translation, his treatment of his Western public has sometimes amounted to an insult to their intelligence. He has carefully selected such simple, sweet things as he appears to think they can appreciate. Perhaps not one of the greater poems that he has translated is not badly truncated. Lest I seem to have spoken unjustly, I set side by side not a great poem but a very true and beautiful one and his English 'translation.' Its title is *Happiness*.

'To-day is free from clouds; the happy skies
Laugh like a friend; on breast and face and eyes
A gracious breeze blows soft, as if there fell
On these our bodies the invisible
Skirts of the sleeping Heavenly Bride;[1] my boat,
On the calm Padma's peaceful breast afloat,
Sways in the liquid plash; in distance gleam
Half-sunken sands, like creatures of the stream
Sprawling at bask; high, crumbled bluffs; and trees

[1] The Ten Directions—*i.e.* the eight points of the compass, with the zenith and nadir—are represented in Hindu mythology as ten deities and their consorts. Here they are all visualised as one unseen, sleeping Sky-Beauty.

Dark with deep shade, and hidden cottages.
A narrow, winding path its streak has worn
From some far hamlet through the fields of corn,
And dips to the water like a tongue athirst.
The village women, to the throat immersed,
Shrill gossip hold, their garments drifted round ;
Their high, sweet laughter makes one rippling sound
(Reaching my ears) with the light waves that run ;
With bent head and with back stooped to the sun,
Sits an old fisher, weaving, while his boy
Round the moored boat splashes in naked joy,
Shouting and leaping, laughing in delight ;
The buffets of his loving hands that smite
And cuff her, as his playful anger breaks,
The Padma with a mother's patience takes.
Before my boat both banks are plain in view :
A spreading crystal clearness tinged with blue ;
On stream and land and groves, flooded with blaze
Of noon, a streak of varied colour plays ;
In the hot breeze comes scent of mango-flowers
Or tired call of birds amid the bowers
O' the shore.

Today in peaceful current flows
The river of my life ; my mind now knows
Happiness as a very simple thing,
As simple as the opened buds of Spring,
Or as the laughter of an infant's face,—
Widespread and generous, filling every place.
Its eager lips their kiss of nectar thrust
Into each face, with childhood's silent trust,
Each day, each night ! Its strains like music rise
From the World-Harp, flooding the tranquil skies.
Ah, in what rhythmic pattern shall I weave
That music ? How, that others may receive ?
And in what laughing language make it bloom,
And cause it what fair shape and face assume,
A gift for those most dear ? With what love make
It spread through life ? This easy joy how take,
How bring into the homes of men with ease
A boon so soft, so gracious ? If we seize
With eager zeal, it breaks within our hands !
We see it run ! We chase through distant lands,
But nevermore have word of it.

Today
Out of full soul with steadfast gaze each way
I look and look with charmed, delighted eyes,
Reflecting, as I watch the firm, blue skies
And peaceful, placid stream unquivering,
Happiness is a very simple thing !

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF INDIA

I have rendered success impossible by tying my words in chains of rhyme, which necessitate an occasional (very slight) diffuseness which is not in the poet's finished picture. But the poet himself used prose, in which he has often shown us that almost perfect success is attainable—certainly in such prose as his best. However, let us see what he has thought fit to give to his poor pensioners of the West. It is number 51, in *Lover's Gift*:

> 'The early autumn day is cloudless. The river is full to the brim, washing the naked roots of the tottering tree by the ford. The long narrow path, like the thirsty tongue of the village, dips down into the stream.
>
> 'My heart is full, as I look around me and see the silent sky and the flowing water, and feel that happiness is spread abroad, as simply as a smile on a child's face.'

That is all. But it is too much. The picture might have had value of its own—there are elements of value in it, niggardly précis though it is—had he taken any trouble to polish it. As it is, it is a handful of careless words thrown at a public that he seems to have come to despise. He has kept the perfect simile of the path like a thirsty tongue dipping down to the stream; but has ruined it by that touch of cleverness, a red dab of paint from rhetoric's brush, a dab which did not disfigure the original, which makes the path the thirsty tongue of the village. This conceit is good in itself, but had no business to intrude here, where nothing else has any suspicion of cleverness. Then 'the naked roots of the tottering tree' is a 'gag.' I suppose he thought the roots would look picturesque to his simple Western readers; so he brought them out of the 'bag of tricks' that goes with his 'blue beard.' And, of course, he had to add a *ford*. All Western readers expect a ford to go with a river, even if the river is the mighty Ganges herself, about to unite in divine marriage with the Son of Brahma and branch into a thousand waterways, the least of their children a greater than Thames.

GROWING UNPOPULARITY IN INDIA; MENTAL STRAIN; FOURTH FOREIGN TOUR. Returning from

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

England, he ran the gauntlet of homage, and fled to Santiniketan, as I have said. Here the honours already mentioned fell to him. And others also. A mob of five hundred, Europeans and Indians, in a special train, descended on him. He received them in a way which set every bar-library in Bengal buzzing angrily for weeks. I remember asking him a few days later what he had done to make them so vexed. He flushed with memory of the annoyance, and then laughed. 'I told them I did not want this sort of thing. Some of you are my friends, and I value your kindness. But others of you are my enemies, you have always opposed whatever I stood for, and I can't accept your homage.' The hero-worshippers returned, and envy of his success and anger at his refusal to let it be exploited for purposes of empty national brag added a new venom to the detraction which worked more busily than ever. But the poet gained a measure of peace. He wrote the wonderful *Balākā*,—*A Flight of Wild Cranes*[1]—greatest of all his books (written 1914). The vigour and freedom of these lyrics is amazing. The old man—for he insisted on regarding himself as an old man, though only fifty-three—brandished a fiercer torch than ever before the *pandits*, the owls and obscurantists and sticklers for old bad ways. Those gentry had had their beards too painfully singed to care to meet him openly, but they grumbled and worked secretly. He found himself, while his fame was world-wide, less and less of a popular poet in Bengal. The English *Gītānjali* ran into several editions before the Bengali emerged from its first. In this present year of grace (1921) I doubt if his royalties from all his Bengali books, fiction and patriotic prose as well as verse, amount to three hundred rupees a month. I know a Bengali novelist whose royalties last year were nineteen thousand rupees. But the poet had great consolations. Every mind that could think was with him, and, though his following might be small and growing smaller, they

[1] For translations of many *Balākā* poems see *Fruit-Gathering*, especially its last pieces.

were the very brain and soul of his land. He worked on at his school. Its days of poverty were over, and never again would he have to sell his own library to find funds for it. He was an honoured guest at Government House whenever he cared to go there, which was as little as he could without being downright rude. In the beginning of 1916, he published *Phālguni—The Cycle of Spring*. I was one of the audience at the unforgettable first night when it was staged at the Jorasanko house by the Santiniketan boys, and the scenery and the small boys' appearance—as Spirits of the South Wind, and the Bamboo, and other distinguished personages—and their singing were too ravishing for words. It was a complete musical and scenic success. The songs have lived. Greatest of all was the poet's acting as *Baul*, the Blind Bard. But the drama was not a literary success, and its reception by the critics preyed on the poet's mind. He was overburdened in many ways. He had been passing through one of his greatest periods of song-production, when there were times when the house was never silent from his humming, and he had written his fine novel, *The Home and the World*. About the same time, he made one of his most unfortunate excursions into politics, in connection with the assault of certain Presidency College students on Mr. Oaten. The poet came down heavily and excitedly on the wrong side of the fence, writing passionately and unfairly in both English and Bengali. In any case, the whole affair was so trumpery that his commonsense in normal conditions would have kept him from getting mixed up in it. The strain upon him mentally and emotionally, from all these causes, brought him near breaking-point. There was estrangement between him and friends, there were misunderstandings, there was illness and practical breakdown. In the summer, he went to Japan. On the voyage, he translated his *Kanikā* as *Stray Birds*. In Japan, he lectured on *Nationalism*. From Japan, he went to the United States, where he lectured on the same subject and on *Per-*

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

sonality. His tour was a stupendous success, but proved more than he wanted or could bear. He abandoned it, and returned to India. This was in 1917. Heavy sorrow came. His daughter died, in 1918, after long illness. Those who saw him going through the protracted anticipation will never forget his patience and courage. His brainstorm had passed, but his mind was still distressed. The European War was an agony to him, and he wrote incessantly about it. It dazed and bewildered him. He never did anything like justice to the nobler side of the tragedy. To him, it was nothing but a volcano shattering itself with fearful convulsions, the robber-civilisation of Europe flaming to well-deserved ruin. There is hardly a word in all his fiery denunciation that suggests that he knew that countless men as gentle and peace-loving as any Indian who ever lived had 'set their faces steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem,' knowing well that nothing but death awaited them, death when life was most holy and sweet. These men went not to kill but to be killed, and the world is immeasurably poorer today not only by these who died but by many of those who survived. Humanity in her throes did not receive from a great poet the help she had a right to expect. In this matter, at any rate, 'we shall march prospering, not through his presence.' His dislike of England and things Western seemed intensified; yet he could not praise everything he found in his own people, and his *real* sense revived, bringing increased unpopularity on his head. He made an elaborate attempt to spread knowledge among his people by University Extension lectures and a Bengali *Home University Library*.[1] But he soon abandoned his schemes. In 1918, he issued *Palataka*, —*The Runaway*—his last collection of verse. It showed no falling off. The same period saw the creation of many of his best songs.

[1] The proposed editors were Jadunath Sarkar (History and Politics), Pramathanath Chaudhuri (European Literature), Ramendrasundar Tribedi and Prasanta Mahalanobis (Science); with the poet as general editor.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

THE PUNJAB TROUBLES. In 1919 came the Amritsar tragedy, and the Punjab disorders and repression. Tagore became the national voice, once again finding a theme worthy of his greatness. No man in all India spoke with anything approaching his loftiness of protest. His burning indignation reached classic utterance, in his letter to Lord Chelmsford, renouncing his knighthood, the letter of a very great and representative man to an unfortunate man who had been confronted with a situation too much for his powers. 'The accounts of insults and sufferings, undergone by our brothers in the Punjab, have trickled through the gagged silence, reaching every corner of India, and the universal agony of indignation roused in the hearts of our people has been ignored by our rulers—possibly congratulating themselves for imparting what they imagine a salutary lesson.

'The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in their incongruous context of humiliation, and I, for my part, wish to stand shorn of all special distinction by the side of those of my countrymen who, for their so-called insignificance, are liable to suffer a degradation not fit for human beings.'

His renunciation of his knighthood was declined, but he insisted on it, and has ceased to use the title.[1] With its disappearance, his friends felt a relief that a false situation was ended. Knighthoods are not for poets.

FIFTH FOREIGN TOUR. He continued to speak on the Punjab happenings, while refusing to countenance any measures of reprisal, such as a boycott or the non-co-operation movement which soon sprang into being. He was dreaming of making the Santiniketan a kind of World University, a place where all lands might meet and exchange their best. So much scheming, and so much public work, drained him. I remember asking him in April, 1920, if he had ever known a period of deadness in poetry. He answered, 'I am passing through it now.' In that year, he went to England,

[1] No one now uses it, except his publishers.

NATIONAL BOOK TRUST INDIA

where he met with disappointment, finding people less interested in his message. As this has been resented by many of his disciples, I think it only fair that we should remember several things. First of all, values have changed immensely in England. If Shakespere and Aeschylus and Kalidasa were all to come together to this post-War England, they would hardly be fêted as in the old days when men had forgotten how stern life could be. Despite the apparent selfishness and frivolity of life, under the surface there is more hard thinking than ever before; and there is, with many of the best men and women, a renunciation like that which so many of their noblest made when the call came to the trenches, a renunciation of Beauty, that those who come after may have Life, with Art and all good things added. Secondly, the poet's reputation has fallen into the hands, generally speaking, of those whom a wise man avoids, the lovers of whatever is dim and dreamy and only vaguely intelligible. Hence, a distinguished English man of letters spoke for many beside himself, when he wrote to me, 'Rabindranath is at Oxford, but I did not go to hear him. His poetical fame has suffered a slump.' Probably fifty years will hardly undo the harm his absurdly inadequate presentation of his genius to the West has done. After a brief stay in England, he visited France, and then America, in 1921 going to Denmark and Sweden and Germany. In all these places, he found friends, and made the impression which his noble personality and appearance never fail to make. At Copenhagen, there was a torchlight procession of students; in France and Berlin crowded lecture-rooms. He received the greatest possible homage. The Continent previously had never taken him up as enthusiastically as England did at first and therefore had not passed through the phase of disappointment. Even now, strict revision and a presentation of his work *de novo*, eschewing the old jumbling up of work of all periods (but of one sort only) in the same volume, might prevent this phase ever coming at all. But this is too much to hope.

NEW EXPERIMENTS IN FORM. On the eve of this last visit to the West, he published in the *Sabuj-patra—The Green Leaf*[1]—and other periodicals a series of remarkable experiments in a new form, which may be called either *vers-libre* or prose poetry. These pieces are at once prose as intricate and beautiful as he has ever written, and poetry that ranks with his best.

He has returned with his mind eager as ever for new effort, and to fresh activity. All his periods of active participation in public life have been followed by creative periods. He is now sixty years of age, and his experience is Dryden's at ten years older. Thoughts come so fast upon him that his only doubt is whether to run them into verse or 'the other harmony of prose.' Both mediums are at his choice and absolute command; and he has become almost as great a master of English prose as of Bengali, so that his craft can sail on many seas at will.

[1] This had become so much his new organ of expression that Ajit Babu suggested the name '*Sabuj-Patra* Period' for this latest phase of his work (now, latest phase but one). *Patra*, like the English *leaf*, means either *leaf of a tree* or *leaf of a book*.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

PART II—WORK

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

III

THE POET AND CREATIVE ARTIST

A UNIVERSAL POET. An English poet is reported to have said, in the first days of Rabindranath's vogue, under the spell of *Gītānjali* and the wonder of its perfection of beauty, 'He is a great poet, greater than any of us.' Very few English writers would believe this today. Nevertheless, he is a much greater writer than English critical opinion imagines. The first question is, how did Rabindranath, born in the Ganges valley, a Bengali, become the universal poet that he is? For universal he is, if only as a poet who has exquisitely phrased moods of misgiving and wistful trust that have been inarticulate but felt by men and women of many races. Even though his expression of these has frayed with much repetition, the achievement of *Gītānjali* remains, and the world will not be so ungrateful as to forget it. Believing, as I do, that this is not his greatest title to remembrance, I yet take my stand on it, as something admitted. The rest must be proved, or, at least, indicated.

VARIETY OF HIS WORK. Even the brief sketch just finished must have shown that there is an astonishing variety in his work. Drama of every kind, and in every medium,—tragic, symbolical, comic, farcical; in blank verse, rhymed couplet, prose, and prose and lyric mingling,—novels, short stories, poetry reflective, religious, elegiac, purely lyric,—not even Victor Hugo had a wider range of form and mood. I leave out of account his countless essays and lectures, sermons, criticisms, writings on politics and education, even on economics and psychology. Yet he was born a Bengali. The

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

measure of his loneliness and greatness begins to appear, when we remember that even to-day, after forty years of his influence, there is no other remotely like him. This epoch has been Rabindranath's as emphatically as that of Dante was his, and far more decidedly than Shakspere's was his. He has had no Ben Jonson.

BENGALI OPINION PROVINCIAL. Babu Ajitkumar Chakrabarti, who often took a very objective view of his country and time, notes how strange it is that he should have become so varied and various, or that he should have cared for life in its fulness and variety at all. He mournfully reflects upon the extreme narrowness of Bengali life, and on the ignorance of Bengalis. This is partly due to the pressure of caste, and to the strict purdah which secludes half the race and shuts their eyes. But it is inherent in wider and deeper circumstances. The race has no great traditions,[1] and when it would talk of history must adopt those of other Indian races. Timidity has tightened bonds which events first fastened, and has further circumscribed a sphere of work already very narrow and petty. They do not go down to the sea in ships, neither do they cross to other lands as soldiers. Their trade is in the hands of foreigners, of Englishmen, Scots, Parsis, Marwaris, Afghans, Armenians. Thought, as well as opportunity, is narrowed. It either becomes provincial, Ajit Babu observes, or else runs to ridiculous excess. On the least excuse it shouts, 'Great is Diana of the Bengalis!' and brags that it leads the world, because it has produced a Tagore or a Jagadishchandra Bose.[2] Bengali thought is so provincial that any Englishman who praises Tagore is at once called his 'disciple,' since the popular opinion cannot understand that a man may admire intensely and yet keep independence and critical detachment. The Nobel award was commonly understood to mean that the world's opinion had sent

[1] It is discovering them now.

[2] Bengali *Basu*. Bose, like Tagore, Banerji, Chatterji, Mukherji, is an anglicised form.

him to the head of the class, with the corollary that his race also now 'led all the rest.' Or, if Bengali opinion escapes provincialism, it falls into the slough of uncritical acceptance of everything alien. Bengal's greatest need, intellectually, is that its people should follow the example of their poet, one of the most independent and fearless spirits alive and yet one who has unhesitatingly taken whatever he found good, from whatever source. The mass of his countrymen, as Ajit says, have never begun to realise how enormous their loss is, from these circumscribed, narrow experiences and lives of theirs. In a hundred passages, Rabindranath chafes against these bonds.

Rabindranath, as we have seen, was brought up in the one family where this disability was at its minimum. The mind is greater than its fetters, and here was pulsing, eager life. Hence, as the boy grew up, and came against restrictions on every hand, in the wider world outside his wonderful family, his early freedom 'lusted' against these restrictions, as St. Paul tells us the Spirit lusts against the flesh. Bonds and limits made his eagerness for the universal more clamant. There was much eagerness abroad among his people, eagerness which led to mistakes and consequent reaction into conservatism. Finding these other tides, the tide of his spirit flowed with them, and more strongly than they. As increasing power came to him, he battled for freedom the more fiercely. 'In his poetry of every period,' says Ajit Babu, 'is a restless crying for adventure into the world.' This crying reached its most passionate as he passed into the thirties. Before that, the pageant of life had sufficed, the pride of the eyes had been enough. His aloof manner of living had fostered his critical rather than his sympathetic side. His fastidious perception of values had made him blaze up in passionate revolt against many things in his land. *Manasi*, as I have indicated, marks the fieriest moments of this revolt. There is the bitter, mocking poem which purports to be a dialogue between a Bengali husband and the little

girl whom he has just married. There is *The Impossible Hope*, in which the chatter, chatter, chatter of the men around him seems to have driven him almost crazy. O that I were a desert Bedouin, he cries, instead of one of these meek Bengalis! To live in the vast spaces, to skim the sands on my horse, to wield a spear, to risk my life, to commune with sun and stars and infinity! To have some claim to call myself a man! Then in other pieces he pours scorn upon the card-playing parties who talk glibly of a life which is for men and not for cattle, who read about Cromwell and with a yawn of admiration turn to games and supper. Anger could hardly be more savage still, yet it is, in *Preaching of Religion*. A gang of young 'Aryan' bloods hear a Salvationist missionary call 'Victory to Jesus!' Banding together, as many as possible, they fan their valiant souls aflame. They must save the credit of their 'Aryan' land and name, and wonderful 'Aryan' religion. When they see that the missionary is dressed in the garb of one of their own ascetics and wears no shoes, they can hardly credit the evidence of their eyes. A sahib so meek and defenceless! They make quite sure that he will not attempt to defend himself, and then rush on him all together, and knock him down and beat his head with sticks till the blood runs. The missionary is a figure of heroic pathos and dignity throughout. Suddenly the band imagine they see the police coming. They flee in cowardly terror, but revive in the calm of their homes, where they boast of their great triumph for 'Aryanism' and beat their wives for not having refreshment ready for such warrior-husbands.[1]

The Conflict in His Experience. This conflict of experience, between the wide, full life close to him[2] and the narrow, mean world of his race and time, had its constant effect upon his work. That resolved itself, in one aspect of it, into a lifelong attempt to escape

[1] This sequel is omitted from the present text of *Mānasi*.
[2] In his home.

from the narrower world, an attempt which took double shape. Sometimes it drove him in upon himself. At other times, it drove him far out of self, into the universal life and the worship of Beauty. First among his countrymen, he *lived*, in the fullest sense, shrinking from nothing that was life, fearing nothing that was strange or alien. Yet he came home to his own soul, and to God within his soul. That narrow vexing middle world, between himself and the infinite world, he transcended entirely. Or, if he came into it, it was in pursuit of his unresting endeavour to save it from itself, and to make it noble and beautiful. Hence the fulness and variety which mark his poetic effort. His followers claim that he has not only saved his own soul, but also his comrades' homeward way. He is a pioneer in this, in his constant resolve to taste life to the full.

A Pioneer in Poetry, in Form and Manner. It must never be forgotten that he had to make roads, for there really were none save byways. All discipline had to come from within, and a poet's nature is not one that easily submits to any yoke, though it be a self-inflicted one. He found his own path, with none to guide him. His poetry, first to last, has been sincere, as the work of true poets is. Here he has always been true to his innermost self, moments of freak and writing for writing's sake apart, and therefore his work abounds in contradictions. A large book has been written, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore.*[1] But he has never had any philosophy, a fact which he acknowledges most rejoicingly. He has had principles and convictions, felt to the roots of his being, but no mosaic of closely-tesselated dogma. He has been poet, not philosopher, and as poet has made a highway through a swamp. He had to find out how far the old Sanskrit poetry was a satisfactory model today, and how far Western models might be followed or

[1] By Profesor Radhakrishnan (Macmillans). 'Till I saw that title,' said an old and distinguished friend of the poet, 'I did not know he had a philosophy.'

NATIONAL ARCHIVE OF INDIA

naturalised, and had to find new metres. Also, all through his career he has never paused in his effort to enlarge his range. Something of this has been indicated in the biographical sketch, but it calls for closer consideration now.

INFLUENCES: VAISNAVA LYRISTS; KALIDASA. First, the question of sources and inspiration arises. It is only in their formative period that great poets have masters. Therefore, though Rabindranath has never ceased to learn, and is as great a thief as any in all literature, it is in the pre-*Mānasi* period that we must look for influences. First, of course, are the Bengali Vaisnava lyrists. The poet's own authority compels this statement, for did he not in the *Bhānu Singh* songs carefully catch their very notes? And he has never ceased to praise them, has translated them, and always refers to them as his masters. Be it so, then; one must suppose that they are. Yet I have always been rebellious under the importance he ascribes to them, and I believe he does them too much honour. I will say frankly that I am sure they have not influenced him to anything like the extent he has persuaded himself. He is grateful to them because they put him in the way of finding his gift of pure song, and therefore he is more filial than he need be, mistaking for parents those who are only among his chief teachers. When at length I ventured, foreigner as I am, to drag this conviction to light, I was comforted to find that it was shared, 'numbering good wits,' among them Prasanta Mahalanobis and also Babu Ajitkumar Chakrabarti, judging by the little space the latter gives to the Vaisnava singers and his stress on other influences. Rabindranath's real master has been Kalidasa. He never misses a chance of paying Kalidasa homage, either by explicit panegyric or by the subtler way of paraphrasing or quoting, as Shakspere does Marlowe:

> 'Dead shepherd, now I find thy saw of might.
> Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?'[1]

[1] *As You Like It.*

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Frequently, when the strain is ostensibly a Vaisnava one, and the theme is Krishna and Radha, the real mood is not Vaisnava at all, but, as obviously as possible, is Kalidasa's. The two poets, the greatest India has ever produced, differ as strikingly as they resemble each other. The one is the poet of mountains, rejoicing in their strength and vastness. The other is the poet of rivers and of quiet places. But the two between them so completely represent Indian landscapes, that any third poet hereafter must seek some other way to fame. Both are passionate lovers of the rains, and have given us picture after picture of them which is perfect in faithfulness and charm. Both, again, love the gentler beauties of Nature and character; and both are at home in symbolism and mingle with easy grace in the affairs of Gods and Immortals.

BENGALI POETRY; SHELLEY. A very important strain in Rabindranath's work is the influence of folk-tale and folk-poetry other than Vaisnava. This is responsible for many charming moments, and also for occasional moments of dulness, when it contributes to that cult of the trivial which is the defect of his great quality of interest in the smallest things. The great epics, too, have given him thoughts and incidents that have touched him to fine issues. He is, in spite of the opinion of Calcutta University (on whom be peace!), a very fine Bengali scholar, and there is very little in his own literature which has any value of any sort which has not been taken into his genius. But I think we are justified in placing Western (which means, mainly, English) literature third among formative influences, after Kalidasa and the Vaisnava lyrists. He was called, while in his teens, the Bengali Shelley, and he has translated Shelley, and has acknowledged him as an influence. The *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, he says,[1] was like a transcript of his mind in his youth. 'I felt as if I could have written it.' Shelley has been the favourite English poet of many Indians, and they find

[1] In conversation with Mr. Mahalanobis.

an affinity between his genius and that of their own poets. I remember Loken Palit had a theory that Shelley must have known Sanskrit, because he personified abstractions so in the manner of its poetry. He used to quote, with great emphasis,

> 'Be my bride, and sit by me,
> *Shadow-vested* Misery.'

Sanskrit or not, those two lines might occur anywhere in *Evening Songs*. Shelley's mythopoea, his compound adjectives, his personifications, his unhappiness, especially his vague, poetical unhappiness,—these things fill *Evening Songs*. Both poets show a remarkable readiness to make offers of marriage to any pleasing ghost that comes their way. In Rabindranath, sometimes it is Misery, sometimes it is Evening, sometimes it is his own heart. Often, it is the Poem which he wishes to woo to himself: 'As Day comes, very gently with gentle smiles, and with vermilion on her forehead, to die on the funeral pyre of her husband, in the burning flames of the West; as a dying gust rushes in from sojourn in a strange land towards the forest of its own country, its tired limbs refusing to move, and, as soon as it reaches the grove, dies uttering its last words by the side of its flower-bride! Even so! my Poem! My Bride! Come, with tenderness manifest in your sad face, with tears flowing gently in your eyes!'

It would be hard to find elsewhere such a similarity between two poets of different tongues and civilisations, as this passage shows between Rabindranath and Shelley. The similarity was a natural one, and not due to imitation of the latter by the former. But it is not strange that at first the Indian should have adored the Englishman. That phase went. 'I have long outgrown that admiration,' he told me.

Other English Poets; Keats and Browning. He never walked the great highways of English literature very systematically. He wandered, often in pretty out-of-the-way meadows. He translated; but not from Shakspere, Milton, Wordsworth, Keats, or Browning.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Instead, he translated Christina Rossetti, Mrs. Browning, Hood, Ernest Myers, and (as already related) Shelley; and not these alone, but Philip Marston and Augusta Webster. Among these names, the translated and the untranslated poets, I venture to pick out four. The delicacy and grace of Mrs. Browning and Christina Rossetti attracted him. But real influence I ascribe to Keats and Browning. From Keats's *Odes* he learnt, if my guess is right, to build up magnificent stanza-forms in his own tongue, by which he enriched it immensely. His stanzas are very many, and carried Bengali poetry far beyond the metres introduced by Hemchandra Banerji. The following lines will give a notion of the stanza in which *Urbasi* is written:

'Like some stemless flower, blooming in thyself,
When didst thou blossom, Urbasi?
That primal Spring, thou didst arise from the yeast of Ocean,
In thy right hand nectar, venom in thy left.
The swelling, mighty Sea, like a serpent tamed with spells,
Drooping his thousand, towering hoods,
Fell at thy feet!
White as the *kunda*[1]-blossom, a naked beauty, adored by the King of Gods,
Thou Stainless One.'

The *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is a favourite poem with him; and there is evidence that he admired these compact, masterly stanzas very early in his career, and he has certainly made such stanzas at home in his own tongue. But a stronger influence than Keats was Browning. This influence came as he entered upon maturity. It is very marked in the new psychological interest of many poems in *Manasi*, it is present in that first group of non-symbolical plays, it is present most strongly and nobly of all in the short dramatic dialogues of the later nineties, *Gandhari's Prayer*, and *Karna and Kunti*. In his novel, *The Home and the World*, he has made a striking adaptation of the scheme of *The Ring and the Book*, telling the one story through different minds.

[1] A jasmine.

But, in the case of a wide and desultory reader like Rabindranath, it is not possible to say where he found the suggestion for this or that idea or phrase. It is enough, that he has 'taken his own where he found it,' and has laid under contribution German, and French, and Russian literature, as well as Sanskrit and English.

MONOTONY OF STYLE IN MUCH OF HIS WORK. It seems hard to maintain that he is a poet of wide range, in face of so much superficial evidence to the contrary. It must be admitted that he has written a great deal too much, and that the chief stumblingblock in the way of accepting him among great poets is the inequality of his work. There are frequent outcroppings of stony ground, as in a Bengal upcountry landscape. Also, especially in his earlier books, there is a vast amount of flowery undergrowth which needs a sickle or (better still) a fire, to clear the loftier trees and show them in their strength and nobleness. There is a recurrence of a certain vocabulary, of flowers, south wind, spring, autumn, tears, laughter, separation, tunes, bees, and the rest, which sometimes is positively maddening. This sort of thing is most apparent when he is least inspired, but it is by no means absent from his best work. 'In Rabindranath,' said a Bengali to me, 'flowers are always opening, and the south wind is always blowing.' Even in much of the noblest work of his later years, his incorrigible playfulness, the way in which, often when most serious, he will fondle and toss with fancies, spoils some splendid things. In his lectures and addresses, he can never resist the temptation of a glittering simile. Often he dazzles the beholder with beauty when he wishes most to convince. When he should run a straight course, he turns aside. Never was such an Atalanta. From all this comes sometimes a sense of monotony, which hides from the reader the richness and versatility of his work. This is the great weakness of his earlier work, that which finishes with *Chaitali*. One is often surprised, on analysis, to find how much of even his most exquisite work is built upon themes well-worn with him. Never has he

expressed more perfectly his wistful sense of loss in the visible world, than in that lovely finish of *Urbasi*:

'She will not return, she will not return! That Moon of Glory has set,
She has made her home on the Mount of Setting, has Urbasi!
Therefore today, on earth, with the joyous breath of Spring
Mingles the long-drawn sigh of some eternal separation!
On the night of full moon, when the world brims with laughter,
Memory, from somewhere far away, pipes a flute that brings unrest,
The tears gush out!
Yet in that weeping of the spirit Hope wakes and lives,
Ah, Unfettered One!'

Moon, *Spring*, *sigh*, *eternal*, *separation*, *night and full moon*, *laughter*, *flute*, *unrest*, *tears*, *weeping*, *Hope*,—these are the old performers, none absent. There is many a passage in Rabindranath when you might call the roll, and, if one of these were present, all the rest would click their heels and answer. Here, in the supreme inspiration of *Urbasi*, they are transfigured into unsurpassable loveliness, which no criticism can touch. Yet, as the flawless Idea which lives in God's presence suffers loss with the judgment of us mortals for the faulty embodiments of that perfection which we see and have made, so even on the best of the poems of his early period some shadow falls from memory of the many passages which have their accidents without their essential of inspiration.

ABUNDANCE OF NATURAL IMAGERY. Yet this fault really witnesses to a great strength, his wonderful abundance of imagery. In these early years, had he carried a pruning-knife through orchards in blossom, their beauty would have shown to greater advantage. But the beauty is there, in wealth that makes the beholder catch his breath. Most of all, wealth of natural illustration. Here we get very close to the heart of his genius, and can confidently claim for him the title of great poet. No poet that ever lived (I shall use this phrase again) has had a more constant and intimate touch with natural beauty. He can use, at his best, the same images and

pictures, the oldest ones in the world, a score of times in as many lines, and each time with freshness and charm. His wealth here is inexhaustible, and it is as manifest in prose as in verse, and today, after his swift advance in mastery of the tongue, is almost as manifest in English as in Bengali. Let this be noted, then, for it is part of the reason why he is not a small poet, and in this book is not going to be admitted to be one. But a much greater and stronger reason remains, in his treatment of the spirit of natural beauty.

VARIETY AND FRESHNESS OF NATURAL IMAGERY. But first, before we pass to consideration of that, two important points demand mention. There is the variety, as well as the freshness and abundance of his natural magic. My Bengali friend, who complained of too much south wind and a glut of flowers, had reason. Only too many suppose that Rabindranath is a poet of softer beauty, evading the sterner. But this was never the case, even in his early work; at any rate, was never the case after *Evening Songs*. In *Mānasi*, for example, is one of the grandest and most terrible sea-storms in the world's literature—written, not by an Englishman, but by a Bengali. I quote its opening stanzas:

SEA-WAVES

'Destruction swings and rocks on the lap of the shoreless sea,
In dreadful festival!
Clanging its hundred wings, the indomitable Wind
Rages and runs!
Sky and Sea revel in mighty union,
Veiling the world's eyelash in blackness!
The lightning starts and trembles, the waves foam in laughter,—
The sharp, white, dreadful mirth of brute Nature!
Eyeless, earless, homeless, loveless,
The drunken Forces of Evil
Have shattered all bonds and are rushing wildly to ruin!

Mingling all horizons, the darkened Sea
With tumult, with crying,
With anger, with terror, with heaving, with shouting and laughter,
With mad bellows,
Swells and seethes and crumbles,
Struggling to find its own shores!

It is as if, the earth flung aside, *Bāsuki*[1] is playing,
Spreading his thousand hoods, swingeing his tail!
As if the Night has melted and shakes the ten directions[2] together,
A moving mass!
It tears to tatters the net of its own sleep.

There is no tune, no rhythm! It is the dance of brute Nature,
Meaningless, joyless!
Can it be that vast Death, taking to himself a thousand lives,
Is dancing there?
Water, vapour, thunder, wind have found blind life,
Are exerting aimlessly the nerves of new being,
They know no direction, heed no stay or hindrance,
In terror of self they rush to their ruin!
See, in their midst are eight hundred men and women,
Clinging to each other,
Life clasping life! They stare before them.'

THE POET OF BENGALI SEASONS. His very many descriptions of the Rains abound in imaginative touches; the lightning, like a fiery snake, biting the darkness again and again, the clouds appearing on the aerial stage like dancers, shaking their tambourines of thunder, and disappearing. Many and many a page seems to be soaked and sodden with his intense realism. What is perhaps his finest story, *Cloud and Sun*, opens:

'It had rained all yesterday. Today, the rain had ceased, and all morning straggling rays of sunlight and dense masses of cloud drew their shadows, like the strokes of a brush, over the autumn fields of ripening paddy. The spreading green canvas would flush beneath the streaks of sunlight, only to fade into dimness again; growing golden, it swiftly exchanged its brightness for cool shadows and quiet colours. Cloud and sun, sole actors in the sky's vast theatre, played their parts; and their every movement found immediate response on that lower stage, an endless flicker and alternation.'

That is a typical day of the Indian Rains. Such a story as *Living or Dead* is not less wonderful, in the way in which he can bring a sudden rain-drenched gust sweeping across the pages. There is the wind which

[1] The serpent who upholds the earth.
[2] The eight points of the compass, the zenith and the nadir.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

blows out the candle, as Jōgmāyā and her husband are arguing about their uncanny guest; or the utter dampness of that hut on the burning-*ghāt*, where the watchers by the body wait for their companion to bring the wood. But he is not simply a poet of the Rains. He has a thousand pictures, all distinct from each other, and all perfect, of every Indian season. Autumn is a favourite of his, as she deserves to be; and he personifies her as Lakshmi, the gracious goddess. Noon in the summer heats is another favourite; and he can make the page quiver with its tense, blinding quietness. Spring,—and he can make the page fragrant with *bakul* blossom and musical with bees. Winter he does not care so much about, but has depicted equally well when he chose.

THE JIBANDEBATĀ DOCTRINE. Secondly, his Nature poetry is closely connected with that characteristic phase, the *jibandebatā* doctrine. This doctrine, like most that is most characteristic in Tagore, is a blend of several threads. In it are Indian teaching as to reincarnations and previous births; the revelation of modern science concerning the way in which the strands of all being reach back to dim, hidden beginnings; the findings of psychology; and, binding all and giving them in their union a personal quality of his own, there is the poet's own imagination and inspired guessing. *Jibandebatā* means *Life-God*. The *jibandebatā* is the oversoul who binds in sequence the poet's successive incarnations and phases of activity. He is not God; on this, the poet insists. Yet he is more than the poet himself; or, at any rate, more than any one embodiment of the poet. He is the *daemon* of Socrates; is the *Idea* of Plato; is the Quaker's *Inner Light*, considered not as God but simply as the revelation of God. The poet does not sanction our saying that he is any one of these things, yet it is certain that he is all of them. The doctrine dawned on Rabindranath only gradually. Even in *Evening Songs*, the poet is conscious of a voice sounding in his heart which is not just his own voice, yet has affinities with his own voice. In *Morning Songs* is one poem, *The Echo*, which is startling, as what is almost a

jibandebatā poem years before its time. Then in *Mānasi* the doctrine begins to take conscious shape, and in *Sonār Tari* and *Chitrā* it is the most characteristic thing. It appears strikingly in the dedication-poem of *Chaitāli*. Then its sway is practically over, because by its means the poet, when the next stormy and uncertain years are finished, and he has leisure for poetry again, has attained to a peace and knowledge of God which make all else fall to one side.

In such a poem as *Swinging*,[1] the poet is seeking an understanding with this strange, beautiful, terrible mistress of his life. That makes the poem intelligible, when before it could hardly have been more than an obscure love-poem set in an atmosphere of magnificent storm. In other poems, the poet humbly asks the *jibandebatā* if he is pleased with him (Rabindranath) and with the revelation of himself that has been made in the poet's work. In yet other poems, he asks, terrified or bewildered, whither the *jibandebatā* is leading him.

It is easy to dismiss all this as poetic fancy, but I can assure the reader that the poet means it seriously. It led to misunderstanding. The poet claimed to an interviewer that at his best he was inspired, for a voice that was not simply his own weakness spoke through him. This claim he would make for all true poets, in so far as they are poets. What is weak and poor in his work is his fault; what is good is the *jibandebata's* doing. Dwijendralal Ray[2] accused Rabindranath of setting up as an inspired prophet, the first step towards claiming the honours of avatarhood. The poet replied. D. L. Ray returned to the charge. Rabindranath remained silent. But parties sprang up, those who held with him and those who held with his antagonist. Many will think with Ray. Yet surely the poet's intuition was not without reason, when it guessed between this individual life and the Infinite Life some medium which is the sum

[1] *Jhulan* (*Sonār Tari*); see No. 82 in *The Gardener*.
[2] The popular dramatist and song-writer.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

and whole of whatever imperfect phases and expressions the former may have known and be going to know. Nor, even if this life be the first conscious one, is it unreasonable to suppose that this dumb matter which has been built up from the travail of so long a process has some dim memory stirring of its pre-human days. Thus, the poet often turns to the thought of pre-existence and of recollection from such existence. In some of the most imaginative passages he ever wrote, he turns back in memory to the æons when the Earth was molten, or when she was a waste of water, and he feels still the fiery breath of those vapours and the mighty roll of that surge.[1] His mind naturally followed with keenness all that science had to teach of those great ages, and the discoveries of his distinguished fellow-countryman, Sir Jagadishchandra Bose, have had no more eager or understanding student. The Earth has never known a son more filial, or one who has knelt to her in more worshipping wise; and this is because he knows that he is breath of her breath, bone of her bone, in soul and mind and memory no less than in body.

Power of Identifying Himself with Nature. From this comes his greatest and most individual gift. No poet that ever lived has shown his power of identification of himself with Nature, of sinking into her life. T. E. Brown would have rejoiced to know his work. What Marvell imagined—[2]

> 'Casting the body's vest aside,
> My soul into the boughs does glide'—

what Brown imagined—[3]

> 'All that my life has in me wrought
> Of complex essence shall be brought
> And wedded to those primal forms
> That have their scope in calms and storms'—

he has realised in his best work with absolute completeness.

[1] See poems in *Sōnār Tari* and *Chitrā*.
[2] *The Garden*. [3] *Epistola ad Dakyns*.

POWER OF MERGING HIS FIGURES WITH HIS LANDSCAPE. Again, no poet that ever lived has shown such a power of merging not only himself but his human figures with their landscape. Here he is absolutely great, and absolutely original. Sometimes, the mingling is a matter of subtle and exquisite perception of the intimate inter-relation between mind and matter. 'But black eyes need no translating; the mind itself throws a shadow upon them. In them thought opens or shuts, shines forth or goes out in darkness, hangs steadfast like the setting moon, or like the swift and restless lightning, illumines all quarters of the sky.'[1] Sometimes, it attains to such a haunting picture as that of the lonely, dumb girl at noon; 'in the deep mid-noon, when the boatmen and fisherfolk had gone to their dinner, when the villagers slept, and birds were still, when the ferryboats were idle, when the great busy world paused in its toil, and became a lonely, awful giant, then beneath the vast, impressive heavens there were only dumb Nature and a dumb girl, sitting very silent—one under the spreading sunlight, the other where a small tree cast its shadow.'[1]

THESE GIFTS SHOWN IN HIS SHORT STORIES. This rich, individual gift of his nowhere finds more satisfying expression than in his short stories. Indeed, Ajit Babu goes so far as to say that most of these are 'written to express single phases'—or, 'moods'—'of Nature.' This is saying too much. The stories, the best of them, are excellent stories. But Ajit Babu's remark does suggest the weakness of the few failures among them, which is that the poet has written as poet or philosopher, and not as story-teller. These we can ignore, while noting the outstanding qualities of the best stories, qualities which put him among the world's greatest short story writers. First among them is their range and variety. This writer or that has surpassed Rabindranath in some quality or other. But where are we to find a writer of stories so

[1] *Subhā* (*Māshi and Other Stories*).

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

different and so good as *Hungry Stones*, *Living or Dead*, *Subhā*, *Cloud and Sun*, *The Kingdom of Cards*, *The Trust Property*, *The Riddle Solved*, and *The Elder Sister*? Four of these eight are of the deepest tragedy, a very unusual feature in an Indian writer; two are of tragedy of a less mixed and absolute kind, but sufficiently poignant, with irony salting the bitterness and with tender laughter softening the pathos; one deals with a realm of sheer phantasy, two are ghostly; several are masterly psychological studies. It is strange that his stories have received so little fame in the West; they are the most under-rated of all his work.

His Irony. Irony is almost the differentia of his stories, being always present. By it the poet supplies the place of comment and chorus to his own action. It is present when Subhā's parents sell her, or her disappointed husband goes to get another wife; and present when Krishnagōpāl stands beneath the banian making confession to his son; it is the very woof of *The Skeleton*; it is terrible in that pregnant summary of a whole history of stupid cruelty, at the finish of *Living or Dead*, when Kādambini 'by dying made proof that she had been alive.' It gives edge to stories which were tracts for the times, exposing social evils, with a relentlessness and imaginative force which no pamphlet could attain.

Social Questions in His Stories. No question has stirred him more deeply or constantly than the position of women. His stories show an understanding of women, as the work of exceedingly few men does. His youth owed a very great deal to the friendly encouragement and comradeship of his elder brother's wife, whose death was a poignant grief to him; and many of the letters and poems of his Shileida days were addressed to his niece Indira (Mrs. Pramathanath Chaudhuri). His fiercest scorn has flashed out at Hindu society for its child-marriage and cruel treatment of girls who are little more than babies. I remember saying to him that Hindus lost five years of childhood in their girls, just

when they were most delightful. He replied, 'I quite agree with you, and it is the saddest thing in our lives.' His sympathy and understanding have had their reward. Whatever mistakes his countrymen have made, in following the vogue of this or that third-rate writer, his most intellectual countrywomen have never made any as to where these men stand in letters and where Rabindranath stands. Judging by the many charming and interesting stories by Bengali ladies which have come my way, in book and manuscript, his is the one influence which puts all others into a very cold and deep shade.

THE GLAMOUR OF SOME STORIES. Of the poetical beauty of the stories something has been said. I would add to this their glamour. The authors of *The Blessed Damosel* and of *Christabel* would have been glad of the chance of reading *Hungry Stones* or *The Lost Jewels*.

HIS NOVELS. His novels deserve more serious notice than can be given here. Two of them are available in English, and their qualities and shortcomings can be appreciated. They will remain the classic pictures of the Bengal of his time. Especially admirable is their detachment, shown, for example, in the remorseless exposure, in *The Home and the World*, of the meaner side of that great anti-Partition movement in which he took so prominent a share. Very few men could have seen and criticised so clearly, and yet have remained convinced partisans. His greatest novel of all, *Gorā*, is the greatest novel in Bengali (which almost certainly means in Indian) literature. Its fulness and closeness of observation have been followed by the greatest of Rabindranath's successors, Saratchandra Chatterji, who has expressed to me his intense admiration for *Gorā*. The qualities of the short stories can be found in the novels, if not in the same concentration of beauty yet on a wider field and in fuller study.

HIS DRAMAS. It will have been seen that Rabindranath's creative work cannot be divided up, but that poems and fiction must be taken together. His

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

dramatic work similarly refuses to allow of any clear-cut division into prose and poetry. Some of it is witty prose dialogue, as is *Baikuntha's Manuscript*; at the other extreme we have the sheer loveliness of *Chitrāngadā*; and between are dramas and dramatic dialogues of every texture between prose and poetry. His dramas may be classified in three main groups. There are the *Sadhanā* dramas, his best, the best Indian dramas since Sanskrit days. Their beauty, though subtle and variegated, is always clear, and the symbolism does not fog the action. They are vehicles of ideas, powerfully filled with conviction; yet things happen in them, and usually happen rightly and naturally. *Sacrifice*, especially, has shown that it possesses stage-qualities that can make it a success today.

Dramatic Dialogues. The second group are the brief dialogues of the late nineties. The way for these was pointed by *Chitrāngadā* and *The Curse at Farewell. Gāndhāri's Prayer* is statuesque; *Lakshmi's Testing* is gracious and mocking; *Karna and Kunti* is as tense and moving an interview as any literature possesses. The first and last are classical in theme, and establish their relationship with the great literature of Sanskrit by moments as powerful as any of its own. In *Gāndhāri's Prayer*, Durjyadhan, who has won by sharp practice and sent his kinsmen into exile, faces his father and mother. He is a Prussian, extolling strength and success. Passion, as commonly in Rabindranath, enters with the woman, with the mother, who pleads that her husband renounce their son. He refuses, and the Queen is left alone, to voice the wrongs of the uncounted ages. *Karna and Kunti* shows us Kunti, the Pandava Queen, trying to win Karna, the unacknowledged son of her shame, from the Kaurava host. To-morrow he will die in battle, as he knows well. But when his mother refused to give him his birthright, years before, she set an eternal gulf between the life that is his and the life that should have been his. He remains with the host of his adoption, who trust him. The piece is beyond

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

praise. *Lakshmi's Testing* gives us a generous queen, a sharp, selfish maidservant, and Lakshmi herself. The Goddess makes the grumbling maidservant a queen. She behaves as might have been expected, and finally spurns the Goddess herself, who comes disguised. There is a quick reversal back to her real estate, as Lakshmi reveals herself, and—Khiri the servant wakes up from her dream, vowing to serve her generous mistress better in future and without complaint for the position which she now sees is the only one she is fit for.

SYMBOLICAL PLAYS. The third group of plays embraces all his later ones. All, including even the playlets which he has written for his Santiniketan boys, sometimes very simply for the youngest boys of all, are symbolical. I find them clouded, with too much 'sob-stuff' in them and often a tiresome insistence on the tremendous significance of the trivial. The life has gone from them, for the symbolism has been a vampire, sucking the blood of action away. Yet all the plays have qualities. Several have been acted with success before select (if not selected) audiences in London and Dublin. *The Post-Office*, especially, is a favourite with all Tagorites (if one may coin a horrible word), both in the West and in India. *Phālguni—The Cycle of Spring*—is redeemed by its songs; *The King of the Dark Chamber* by the majesty of the conception which it presents. At least one, *Autumn-Festival*, is just delightful, an open-air frolic. The English reader should remember that it is translations which he is reading.

HIS DRAMATIC GIFT NEVER CARRIED TO FULFILMENT. I feel that the poet has never realised his possibilities as dramatist. He is a natural dramatist, when symbolism does not strangle his powers. His earlier dramas reached an achievement which he failed to carry to fulfilment. If today he were to return to drama, fighting against his incorrigible tendency to

> 'See the world in a grain of sand,
> And a heaven in a wild flower,'—

a tendency which can become a habit and, like all things in excess, very wearing to others, he might lift himself quite out of the rank of great dramatists—in which *Sacrifice* and *Mālini* and *Karna and Kunti* undoubtedly placed him securely for all time—into the small class of very great dramatists. The Tagorite will demur, that the symbolism is essential, is veritable Tagore. He need not vex himself. Though the poet should fight his sternest against it, enough of symbolism would inevitably enter, to give his work the right Tagore note.

His Songs and Lyrics. His most characteristic and popular work awaits a word. Everyone has heard how his songs have passed into the daily life of Bengal. Here, for once, Mr. Rhys and Mr. Yeats and the others all touch fact. His songs are popular, with a popularity often made boundless by the tunes to which he has set them. 'There is no doubt,' as he said to me, 'that I have conquered my countrymen by my songs. I have heard even drivers of bullock-carts singing my latest and most up-to-date songs.' His songs are some fifteen hundred in number, and are of all periods. His latest are better than his earlier, which is strange, since the gift of song is a young poet's gift and leaves most poets as age clogs the current of their blood. His songs are of a grace and lightness that no translation can convey. In them we have the one altogether adequate portrayal of her manifold moods that Bengal has produced.

> 'For every season he has dressings fit,—
> Spring, autumn, winter, summer.'

If the reader can take his English books, and find the half-dozen lyrics most perfect in grace and suggestion, and then in imagination multiply that grace and suggestion tenfold, he can guess what these songs are like.

Essentially a Lyrist; Development of Lyrical Form and Range. The basis of his work is essentially lyrical. *Evening Songs* showed, long ago, that a new lyrist had arisen. Their characteristics have been

excellently given in Dr. Brajendranath Seal's famous praise[1]—over-praise, as Dr. Seal would admit today, but genuine discernment. Indulgence is due to the enthusiasm of a man who recognises first a new star, of a different kind, in brightness and magnitude, from any already visible in the heavens. He speaks of 'aerial fascinations and somnolescences, dissolving phantasms and sleepy enchantments, twilight memories of days of fancy and fire, ghostly visitings of radiant effulgences, or the lightning-flashes of a Maenad-like inspiration,' which float under the grey skies of evening and are 'transfixed and crystallised for us in many a page of delicate, silver-lined analysis, of subtly-woven, variegated imaginative synthesis.'

Rabindranath has used an immense number of stanza-forms, and has experimented endlessly with metre, is experimenting today. His greatest book, *Balākā*, over thirty years later, shows the lyric freedom of *Evening Songs* carried many degrees further, till the metres stream over the page, hither and thither, in the swiftest and most perfect obedience to the poet's dancing mood. And the greatest thing of all is that this freedom goes with the strongest thought that the poet had ever shown. *Balākā* is a great book intellectually, with a never-pausing flow and eddy of abstract ideas. Its imaginative power surpasses that of any earlier book, and moves to admiration continually. In diction, the book completes the merry defiance of convention which *Kshanikā* had begun.

Religious Lyrics. The beauty of his religious lyrics is adequately presented by the English *Gitānjali*, in such perfect pieces as this:[2]

> 'Day after day, O lord of my life, shall I stand before thee face to face? With folded hands, O lord of all worlds, shall I stand before thee face to face?
>
> Under the great sky in solitude and silence, with humble heart shall I stand before thee face to face?
>
> In this laborious world of thine, tumultuous with toil and with struggle, among hurrying crowds shall I stand before thee face to face?

[1] *New Essays in Criticism*, p. 75. [2] No. 76.

And when my work shall be done[1] in this world, O King of kings, alone and speechless shall I stand before thee face to face?'

Or in such a sublime turn of imagination as:

'Thou didst not turn in contempt from my childish play among dust, and the steps that I heard in my playroom are the same that are echoing from star to star.'[2]

PATRIOTIC POETRY. Even his patriotic poetry has very many passages of the truest feeling and noblest expression. Here is the poem whose Bengali title is *Āshā*[3]—*Hope*,—which we may call *The Poet's Dream*:

'Mother, my sun had set. 'Come, child,' you said;
You drew me to your heart, and on my head
With kisses set an everlasting light.
About my breast, of thorns and blossoms plight,
A garland hung, Song's guerdon,—in my heart
Its pangs burnt deep; your own hand plucked apart
The barbs, and cleansed of dust, and did bedeck
With that rekindled loveliness my neck:
You welcomed me, your son to endless years.

Rising, I lift my heavy lids of tears;
I wake—I see—and all a dream appears.

GREATNESS AS A LYRIST; URBASI. To show his greatness as lyrist, and as poet, extensive quotation would be necessary. But space is exhausted, so I finish with three stanzas from *Urbasi*, part of which has been quoted already. Urbasi is the heavenly dancer of Indra's court, the type of Eternal Beauty, who in the beginning rose from the sea when it was churned by the Gods to recover the lost nectar of immortality.

'Wast thou never bud, never maiden of tender years,
O eternally youthful Urbasi?
Sitting alone, under whose dark roof
Didst thou know childhood's play, toying with gems and pearls?
At whose side, in some chamber lit with the flashing of gems,
Lulled by the chant of the sea-waves, didst thou sleep on coral bed,
A smile on thy pure face?

[1] An Englishman would have written 'is done.' Cf. what I said as to tiny slips in his English.
[2] No. 43, *Gitānjali*. [3] *Kalpanā*.

That moment when thou awakedst into the universe, thou
wast framed of youth,
In full-blown beauty!

From age to age thou hast been the world's beloved,
O unsurpassed in loveliness, Urbasi!
Breaking their meditation, sages lay at thy feet the fruits of
their penance;
Smitten with thy glance, the three worlds grow restless with
youth;
The blinded winds blow thine intoxicating fragrance around;
Like the black bee, honey-drunken, the infatuated poet
wanders, with greedy heart,
Lifting chants of wild jubilation!
While thou . . . thou goest, with jingling anklets and waving
skirts,
Restless as lightning!

In the assembly of Gods, when thou dancest in ecstasy of joy,
O swaying Wave, Urbasi!
The companies of billows in mid-ocean swell and dance, beat
on beat;
In the crests of the corn the skirts of Earth tremble;
From thy necklace stars fall off in the sky;
Suddenly in the breast of man the heart forgets itself,
The blood dances!
Suddenly in the horizon thy zone bursts asunder;
Ah, Wild in Abandonment!'

The Western reader can gain little notion of this glorious poem's wealth of allusion, in which Indian mythology mingles with European legends of mermaids and with recollection of the 'perilous goddess' who was born of the ocean-foam. Neither can he remotely guess at the melody of the splendid, swaying lines, knit into their superb stanzas, or the flashing felicity of diction in such a line as that one:

'In the crests of the corn the skirts of Earth tremble.'

But something of its unflagging glory of imagination should touch him with gladness, something of its wonderful succession of pictures should unfold before his vision,—enough, surely, to make him see that the man who wrote *Urbasi* produced a world-masterpiece, and not merely the most accomplished lyric of

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

India, and won for himself the right to be included among the world's lyric poets.[1]

[1] A complete translation of *Urbasi*, as also of *Sea-Waves*, *Dharma-Prachār*, and other pieces referred to in this book, will be found in my forthcoming *Poetry of Rabindranath Tagore* (Oxford University Press).

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

IV

THE REFORMER AND SEER

HIS RELIGIOUS TEACHING LATER THAN HIS PUBLIC ACTIVITY. No man's life and work fall into compartments. But it is true that it was from political and social activity that Rabindranath passed to educational experiment, and from the last to the peace and poise which mark his religious attitude and are his message today. There never was a period when religion was not a serious matter to him. Nevertheless, in his own words, 'The day was when I did not keep myself in readiness for thee; and, entering my heart unbidden, even as one of the common crowd, unknown to me, my king, thou didst press the signet of eternity upon many a fleeting moment of my life.'[1]

YOUTH A PERIOD OF IMPRESSIONS AND EXPERIENCES. At first, as we have seen, his life was one of gathering impressions. Moments of illumination came, notably the one which flooded his mind with happiness in early manhood and produced the most spontaneous of the *Morning Songs*. 'The end of Sudder Street, and the trees on the Free School grounds opposite, were visible from our Sudder Street house. One morning, I happened to be standing on the veranda, looking that way. The sun was just rising through the leafy tops of those trees. As I continued to gaze, all of a sudden a covering seemed to fall away from my eyes, and I found the world bathed in a wonderful radiance, with waves of beauty and joy swelling on every side. This radiance pierced in a moment through the folds of

[1] *Gītānjali* (English, No. 43).

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

sadness and despondency which had accumulated over my heart, and flooded it with this universal light.

'That very day the poem, *The Awakening of the Waterfall*, gushed forth and coursed on like a veritable cascade. The poem came to an end, but the curtain did not fall upon the joy-aspect of the Universe. And it came to be so that no person or thing in the world seemed to me trivial or unpleasing.'[1]

Sudder Street is a dingy, dismal spot, to have given him the illumination which the Himalayas had previously denied.

RABINDRANATH AND THE MAHARSHI. From his father he had a noble inheritance. The *Maharshi* stood out among men by his uprightness and fearlessness, by his stern monotheism and detestation of idolatry, and the fervour of his personal communion with God. His son's mind has shown wider interests, and has been without the sternness. The detestation of idolatry has not been his, for it has been unnecessary. The *Maharshi's* attitude and influence made all question of idolatrous observances for him once for all as dead as they are to any Christian. But the monotheism came to him, with a definiteness that has been overlooked, for all its obviousness.

IN YOUTH, RABINDRANATH OBSERVANT AND CRITICAL. The young poet of *Evening Songs* and *Sharps and Flats* was Beauty's worshipper,

'The allotted bondman of her palm and wreath.'[2]

But his were the most observant eyes in Bengal, with a generous heart whose feelings their impressions fed. In his own family circle had been a free, happy life. But he quickly awoke to the fact that the mass of his countrymen lived in a tyranny which at some points challenged comparison with any cruelty that Time has known. What horrible wrongs enlightened men can permit to exist without any protest the history of many lands and periods has shown. Let the Westerner who feels entitled to fling a stone at some

[1] *My Reminiscences* (translation, pp. 217-18).
[2] D. G. Rossetti, *Soul's Beauty*.

NATIONAL PHILOSOPHERS OF INDIA

Indian evils remember England's penal laws of a century ago, or her representatives' paroxysms of fury in the Indian Mutiny or in Governor Eyre's Jamaica régime, or the savagery of both sides in Ireland, or America's lynching record. Yet good men, men earnest for the reform of humanity and for religion, have lived in the same age with these things, apparently untroubled. Rabindranath was not one of such. He is not of those

> 'to whom the miseries of the world
> Are misery, and will not let them rest."[1]

Wrong, and cruelty, I think, do not come home to him as with the stab of personal infliction. But he is one of that not less useful company whose sense of abstract justice is extraordinarily keen and awake, and who are tormented with the thought of things that ought not to be, by any law of God or good men. His intelligence revolted at the folly which passed often for patriotism with his noisier fellow-countrymen, and his attitude, during the first thirty-five years of his life, was chiefly critical. As the preceding pages have shown, he had a lash of cutting anger, freely plied.

GRADUAL GROWTH OF HIS NATIONALISM; THEN, LOSS OF FAITH IN NATIONALISM. But the evils which he saw and hated came gradually closely home to him. The land which was cursed by them was his mother. As he looked at them, he seemed, like so many Indian patriots, to find their cause in her helpless condition. If only she were strong and free, she would expel these foul birds from her altars, where they had nested so long, poisoning the deepest life of her children. He looked at the West, which seemed so powerful, so organised. As he looked, the secret of her effectiveness seemed to come to him. It was her nationalism. Therefore, he, too, would be a nationalist. Let India become a nation, and she would be as strong as these nations overseas. So he entered public life. When a Viceroy, whose many gifts to India were obscured by his habit of giving offence in speech

[1] Keats, *Hyperion, a Vision* (the second draft of *Hyperion*).

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

and manner, said publicly that the Bengalis were liars, Rabindranath replied with all his artillery of sarcasm, even analysing those notoriously truthful things, official communications, and quoting their obsequious conclusion, 'Your obedient servant.' A debating score, and one which does not touch the essential question at issue! But he took up more serious challenges. He unmasked the hollowness and falsity of the Delhi Durbar, a painted shell hiding the poverty of India. He was the heart and soul of the campaign against the Partition. The years of battle brought disillusion. He grew weary of nationalism, which made so much noise and carried with it so few incentives to honesty and unselfishness. What he came to think of it, as a means of salvation, he has shown, in that disillusioned book, *The Home and the World*, and in his book of lectures, *Nationalism*.[1] The latter book is remarkably one-sided and unfair, yet it puts, more powerfully than it has been put elsewhere, the Indian indictment of British rule in his land. The Englishman asks, Is not our rule efficient? Is it not immeasurably juster and honester than the rules which went before it? To which the reply is, Yes. It is just and efficient beyond any comparison with the rule of Mogul or native prince. What is wrong, then? the Englishman asks, bewildered. Rabindranath's *Nationalism* gives him his answer. His rule is impersonal, a matter of machinery. Through the very cracks left by their abounding inefficiency, personality percolated, in the days of the old bad rules. Whereas this foreign rule goes its strong, impersonal way, like an instrument of torture,

> 'exempt itself
> From aught that it inflicts.'[2]

It has given them an Emperor seven thousand miles away, and a Parliament which has no time or wish to attend to their affairs.

[1] Indignant Bengali Nationalists ascribed his changed views (a matter of years before!) to his knighthood. Browning's *Lost Leader* was freely applied to him.

[2] Shelley, *Cenci*.

His Ideas To-day as to Nationalism. His leading ideas are simple and clear enough, though they are expressed with an inexhaustible wealth of picturesque illustration and an angry energy that often defeat their ends, by distracting attention from his theme to its ornaments and accidents. The Western nations to him are robber-nations, organisations for exploitation of the weak. Their government of dependencies is callous and stupid. The Moguls lived in India, whereas the British pass through it for a few years. The Moguls and other former rulers enriched India by art and literature and architecture. The British have given India railways and bridges and bank buildings. The Moguls left the Taj behind them, this epoch will leave the gigantic railway-stations. Its civilisation, he says, is a matter of machinery. 'When this engine of organisation begins to attain a vast size, and those who are mechanics are made into parts of the machine, then the personal man is eliminated to a phantom, everything becomes a revolution of policy carried out by the human parts of the machine, with no twinge of pity or moral responsibility.' The Nation, as the West has evolved it, 'this abstract being,' rules India. 'We have seen in our country some brands of tinned food advertised as entirely made and packed without being touched by hand. This description applies to the governing of India, which is as little touched by the human hand as possible. The governors need not know our language, need not come into personal touch with us except as officials; they can aid or hinder our aspirations from a disdainful distance, they can lead us on a certain path of policy and then pull us back again with the manipulation of office red-tape; the newspapers of England, in whose columns London street-accidents are recorded with some decency of pathos, need take but the scantiest notice of calamities which happen in India over areas of land sometimes larger than the British Isles.'[1] More than any other man, he

[1] *Nationalism*, p. 13.

created the national feeling which is today the most obvious fact in Bengal (and, therefore, throughout India). Yet to him nationalism, in his own land and everywhere, is now the enemy, which obstructs all progress and freedom of thought and life. This has been made startlingly clear by his attitude towards the non-co-operation movement, which has been ravaging Bengal student-life; and some of the leaders of that movement have attacked him with almost incredible insolence. He condemns its sterility and negative teaching. His mission in life, he says, is to strive for reconciliation of East and West in mutual helpfulness.

His Honesty and Earnestness. There is this difference between Rabindranath's indictments and much of the wild criticism which has flooded the path of the British Government in India during recent years. He is sometimes unfair, often one-sided; but he is never either liar or fool. His criticism deserves the closest attention, because no man has a stronger sense of fairness. If he says a thing, it is because he is convinced it is true. Prove it false, and he would withdraw it. In the passages I have quoted there is only too much truth, as many an Englishman in India would admit. Those in the Services who are most sympathetic to India know how few there are today in their ranks who have the close knowledge of the people and things Indian which marked many an administrator and soldier in former days. They know, too, how miserably low the standard of knowledge of the vernaculars has become. Anyone can pass the official tests, whether 'Proficiency' or 'Higher Proficiency.' If a man goes further than this, and actually takes an interest in a vernacular literature, he is repaid by an amount of reputation which ten times the labour and knowledge in any subject could not bring in England. The half-dozen Englishmen who are interested in Bengali literature today are known by name to many whom they have never met, and their attainments are considered much greater than they are.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

HIS ATTITUDE TO THE BRITISH PEOPLE. Rabindranath makes a distinction between the British Nation and the British People. 'I have a deep love and a great respect for the British race as human beings. It has produced great-hearted men, thinkers of great thoughts, doers of great deeds. It has given rise to a great literature. I know that these people love justice and freedom, and hate lies. They are clean in their minds, frank in their manners, true in their friendships; in their behaviour, they are honest and reliable. The personal experience which I have had of their literary men has roused my admiration not merely for their power of thought or expression, but for their chivalrous humanity. We have felt the greatness of this people, as we feel the sun; but as for the Nation, it is for us a thick mist of a stifling nature covering the sun itself.'[1]

HIS GENERALISATIONS AND SWEEPING INDICTMENTS. It is pardonable for the Englishman occasionally to feel a momentary annoyance at the decision with which Rabindranath sets him and his civilisation and religion to rights. Westerners have in the past been good enough to give the East the benefit of their generalisations on many things. Bolder than Burke, they have not shrunk from indicting a nation. The East has learnt the trick from them; and not Rabindranath only, but many a round-mouthed little lawyer or student will speak with readiness and clearness and fulness about their most complex questions, questions which have puzzled those whose whole lives, and those of their ancestors before them, have been lived close to them. As the West began the game, it must put up with it. Rabindranath, at any rate, might have let fall some word of natural pity for the appalling sorrow and ineffable heroism of these last dreadful years. Fault has been committed, and blame abundant is due. But many of those who suffered were innocent. The fathers ate sour grapes, and the children's teeth have been set on edge. Could the poet have carried his

[1] *Nationalism*, pp. 16-17.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

memory back to his own mind of twenty years younger, he would have seen the nobler side of all that he hated so, and might, even, have asked himself if his own civilisation, for all the virtues he finds in it, could have shown one-tenth such patience under pain, such willingness to face agony. Nevertheless, he is right in his insistence that the War was a necessary outcome of the horrible state of things in which the whole West had acquiesced. Is right, too, in his indictment of modern civilisation as material and hard. Here there is a leaven working for better things, and there are many in the West who feel as strongly and deeply as he does. Unfortunately, the curse of modern industrialism, from which the toiling masses of Europe are wrestling to get free, is gripping his India every day more firmly. Not a hundred miles from his beloved Santiniketan, the land is foul with it, the skies are wreathed with factory-smoke, the wayside is piled with slag-mountains. If East and West could combine, each giving where the other is poor!

His Views on Social Questions. In domestic politics, he has been consistent. Woman is different from man, and therefore to him the modern outcries to make her equal with man are meaningless. He would have her remain woman, a centre of love and inspiration without which the world is poverty-stricken. But he has never ceased to attack the injustice and cruelty which regard woman as inferior, as unfitted for education or the arts. The desolation of so many women's lives by the way in which Hindu society treats widows, the shameful marriage-market of Bengal, the sending away of little girls,—these things he has striven against with all his powers. On another Indian institution, caste, he has said, in words often quoted,[1] 'The regeneration of the Indian people, to my mind, directly and perhaps solely depends upon the removal of this condition.' He says this, while recognising the essential services

[1] *Letter to Mr. Myron H. Phelps* (*Modern Review*, August, 1910 and February, 1911).

which the institution of caste rendered in ancient days.

EDUCATIONAL REFORMER; SANTINIKETAN. Out of his political activities came his educational ones. The disillusionment and disappointment which resulted from the one were the direct road to the other. He himself tells us, 'I seemed choked for breath in the hideous nightmare of our present time, meaningless in its petty ambitions of poverty, and felt in me the struggle of my motherland for awakening in spiritual emancipation. Our endeavours after political agitation seemed to me unreal to the core, and pitifully feeble in their utter helplessness. I felt that it is a blessing of providence that begging should be an unprofitable profession, and that only to him that hath shall be given. I said to myself that we must seek for our own inheritance and with it buy our true place in the world.'[1] These words describe his feeling in his days by Padma, but they are certainly not less true of it in the days of his political energy. Accordingly, in 1901, he founded the Santiniketan, beginning with five students only. But his original idea was wider than that of a school, as has been already said. He wanted a home for the spirit of India, distracted and torn in the conflicting winds of the present age. Today, he seeks a home for the spirit of all nations, for his mind is so universal in its sympathies that it can never rest content with a part. That is why he will never be a non-co-operator; he feels too much the need of every part for each. But he began with a school, formed on the model of the old forest-schools of India. The school is now world-famous. Among its teachers have been artists of reputation such as Nandalal Bose and Asitkumar Haldar, writers such as Ajitkumar Chakrabarti and Satischandra Ray, philosophers such as the poet's eldest brother, Dwijendranath Tagore,[2] and Englishmen such as C. F.

[1] *Introduction* to W. Pearson's *Shantiniketan*, p. 2.

[2] Though not a teacher on the staff, he has lived near the school for a quarter of a century, and is one of its formative influences.

NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

Andrews and 'Willie' Pearson.[1] The chief teachers, on whom the poet has placed his main reliance, have been the open spaces around the groves, the trees, dawn and evening and moonlight, the winds and great rains. He believes in the education of Nature, by which

'beauty born of murmuring sound'.

can pass into character. His own broken and not extensive memory of school-life in childhood was unhappy. Therefore, all through his Santiniketan experiment, he has insisted on one thing, first and second, and all along the line,—on freedom, more freedom, always freedom. The place is hallowed by memory of the *Maharshi*, who found three trees—still extant, and marked by a tablet,—in the midst of a bare, uplifted plain, two miles out of Bolpur, and came here to meditate. There are now noble groves, with abundance of the sweet-flowering shrubs and creepers that India loves. Outside the groves, the great plain stretches away, and here the boys sit on mats on moonlight nights while their own teachers or visitors address them. It is a very notable experience to visit Santiniketan. The air seems charged with solemn, happy thoughts, and purer than elsewhere; and the whole place is filled with joyous faces and voices. The boys play games energetically and well, they discipline themselves by means of their own courts, they have their school-song (written by the poet), their place of worship (a church of perfect simplicity, open to the breezes), their organisations for tending the sick among them and for visiting villages and conducting night-schools giving elementary education. A very prominent feature of school-life is their dramatic performances, chiefly of the poet's own plays. The boys are very perfect mimics. Classes take place in the open-air whenever possible, and a boy sits where he will,—up a tree, if he chooses. The one or two criticisms that occurred to me

[1] To whom the poet dedicated *Balākā*, in eight playful, affectionate lines.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

in my casual acquaintance with the school are too trivial to set down here. What is certain is, that the place is the only school in Bengal which has an idea and a personality behind it.[1]

DIFFICULTY OF MAINTAINING THE SCHOOL. For long enough, the school was run at a loss, and the poet was put to all sorts of shifts to find money for it. Officialdom frowned on it; and ordinary parents fought shy of a school which did not tread the orthodox road to the University examinations, but led its rejoicing students through Bypath Meadow. It was a most effective blow at the school when it was allowed to be understood that its pupils would have no chance of Government service. This was years ago. These difficulties no longer exist.

RELIGIOUS ATMOSPHERE OF SANTINIKETAN. The day begins and ends at Santiniketan with prayer. Boys go round the groves, chanting. This is the morning prayer:

'Thou art our Father. Do Thou help us to know Thee as Father. We bow down to Thee. Do Thou never afflict us, O Father, by causing a separation between Thee and us. O Thou self-revealing One, O Thou Parent of the Universe, purge away the multitude of our sins, and send unto us whatever is good and noble. To Thee, from Whom spring joy and goodness, nay, Who art all goodness thyself, to Thee we bow down now and for ever.'

This is the evening prayer:

'The Deity Who is in fire and water, nay, Who pervades the universe through and through, and makes His abode in tiny plants and towering forests—to such a Deity we bow down for ever and ever.'

RABINDRANATH AS RELIGIOUS TEACHER. We come to the matter of our final consideration, Rabindranath as religious teacher and man. This is a question on which no wise man would care to speak at great length or with great positiveness; and, the nearer he has been privileged to come to this noble spirit, the less he cares

[1] For a fuller account, see W. Pearson's *Shantiniketan*.

to give definite expression to what he has come to think. Yet no account of Rabindranath, however brief, can pass it entirely by. I have said that he has no reasoned philosophy. His mind is too mobile and sensitive, too glancing and universal.

IS GITĀNJALI CHRISTIAN IN TONE AND TEACHING? Some things are obvious. Since I have been criticised[1] for saying that it was 'nonsense' to say that the *Gitānjali* represented the teaching of ordinary Hinduism, let me repeat and slightly expand my reply. First of all, it is as plain as can be that his work has none of the outward dress of Hinduism. This is seen to be inevitable, directly one knows the background of his life. At Santiniketan, even the stones cry out, inscribed with texts of austere monotheism. The pillars at the gate prohibit the bringing of idols within or the slaughter of beasts for food or sacrifice. For *Gitānjali*, that exquisite chapbook of mysticism, Indian mythology is exactly what Greek is to a Western poet—a storehouse of illustrations, nothing more. 'The divine bird of Vishnu, perfectly poised in the angry, red light of the sunset,'[2] might be the eagle which carried off Ganymede. He uses the popular Indian story of Love in a human form, sporting with mortal girls, uses it repeatedly,—in his earlier poems for the sake of its background of rain-soaked or flowery forest, in his later for its allegory. Yet in his later verse how changed it is from the form in which popular Hinduism knows it! It has become '*jam pro conscientia Christianus*'; losing its Hindu differentiae, it is one with the Divine Eros of all ages and religions, and the Christian mysticism of any century can parallel even its boldness. But neither idolatry nor mythology forms the battleground. Hinduism and Christianity are at grips in their doctrines of *karma*, life after death, of the nature and character of God. It is hard to see how *karma* can stand without the doctrine of transmigration

[1] In Professor Radhakrishnan's *Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*.

[2] *Gitānjali* (English No. 53).

as its expression and ratification. Yet surely in *karma* we have Hinduism's most characteristic doctrine. Neither the Hindu *karma* nor the Hindu doctrine of transmigration can be found in Rabindranath. The idea of many incarnations is found in his poetry, and it is hard to say with exactly what intensity of belief it is held in each place. Many poets, and not poets only, have played with the thought, or seriously considered the possibility. Reincarnation, for the Christian as for Rabindranath, is an open question. It may happen. We do not know. But, as for the ordinary Hindu doctrine of transmigration, Rabindranath's words, when asked if the common report was true, that his father in his old age inclined to accept it, are explicit: 'My father never believed in that fairy-tale.' Transmigration is losing its hold on modern Hindu thought. I turn to the question of the life after death, which both Christian and Hindu admit, in their different ways. Many Indian minds crave personal immortality. Ramprasad (eighteenth century) asks, in a passionate lyric, 'What is the use of salvation if it means absorption? I like eating sugar, but I have no wish to become sugar.' Rabindranath's thought on this question varies. That Christian is unusually fortunate whose belief in survival of death has never known periods of doubt and clouding over. There are passages in Rabindranath's verse which look forward eagerly to what must be a fuller, and, in a real sense, a personal life, if the longing and its strong expression are to have any meaning. He has told me that he believes that Buddha's mind has been misinterpreted, and that men went wrong in thinking that he taught extinction of personality. But, as to what Rabindranath himself thinks today, the evidence before me is too conflicting for me to care to pronounce opinion. He is a poet, and a poet has moods. He is a man, and a man must struggle.

Religious Ideas of Gitānjali Overassessed. Before touching on the third point, of the poet's teaching as to the nature and character of God, I wish to digress briefly. The West has formed its impression of his

religion chiefly from *Gitānjali*. But one element in the poet's loss of reputation was that men came to see that the religious *ideas* (as distinct from the warmth of personal emotion) of *Gitānjali* had been overassessed. The book's leading thought was of life as *lilā*, a thought which was fresh to the West but commonplace in India. *Lilā* is sport, in its highest meaning rising into drama of tragic and heroic significance, in its lowest sinking into mere play and laughter. Now all life is *lilā*, as Hinduism rightly and nobly insists. But too prevalently in *Gitānjali lilā* seems to bear its least worthy meaning. God is the great playfellow who creates flowers of beauty for His children, and death is a momentary interruption of the *lilā*. Such a conception of life might produce a lovable and interesting personality, but hardly a strong one.[1] And, indeed, the weakness of *Gitānjali*, on its religious side, and of much of Rabindranath's work, especially his poetry, is its minor tone, its wistfulness, almost its wailing. His father's message had something more robust about it.

Christian Influence in His Work and Life. When *Gitānjali* was published, people found so much in it that resembled the best thought in Christianity, that many concluded that the poet had been greatly influenced by Christianity. Some said, he is really a Christian. But this is equal nonsense with saying that his attitude represented ordinary Hinduism. In my judgment, the direct influence of Christianity on his thought has been very little. His father was the least Christian of all the Brahmo leaders. The poet repelled the suggestion that he had been influenced by Christian thought in writing *Gitānjali* by saying that he had never read the Bible—a confession which helps to explain the remarkable thinness of his essays on Christ. A Christian who wrote on Buddha from casual hearsay and general knowledge would not produce anything very creditable to himself. Further, I am sure that the sterner side of Christian

[1] For this criticism I am indebted to the Rev. E. W. Thompson, M.A., formerly of Mysore.

doctrine has made no appeal to Rabindranath. Many Hindus, while remaining Hindus, have felt to the depths of their souls the conflict between good and evil which caused St. Paul to cry out, 'O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this sinful body of death?' They have understood, even while not sharing its attitude, why Christian thought has turned so much to the death of Jesus. Rabindranath had his one moment of fleeting sympathy, when that poor Salvationist was beaten and filled up in his body what was lacking of the sufferings of Christ. Then he never felt it again, this sympathy with the side of Christianity which faces suffering and evil-doing. Nevertheless, Christianity is in the air of India, and Rabindranath has not escaped its influence. What is best in *Gītānjali* is an anthology from the ages of Indian thought and brooding; but it is the sun of Christian influence that has brought these buds into flower. Those who felt, when it appeared, that it was the most hopeful thing that had happened for fifty years, were right. The man who henceforward must rank among the great religious poets of the world did not call himself Christian, and only sheer ignorance of him and of Christianity could claim him as Christian; but in him was given a glimpse of what the Christianity of India will be like, and we see that it will be something better than the Christianity which came to it. The Christianity of India, when it has sloughed its present apathy and mendicancy and poverty of manliness, will help Western Christianity, which has made so many mistakes, to know God and Christ better. The Gospels teach a simplicity of life and of access to God which Western Christianity has overlaid. European Christians who live in India do not live uninfluenced by the broad, free spaces, the generous sun, the flooded moonlight. God in Nature becomes a reality, as to Christ amid the Galilean lilies. We can see, and, seeing, rejoice, that Indian Christianity will have at least a Vedantist tinge. Rejoice, because we know that once again man will share in the joy which is overflowing the worlds, and that the beasts of the field will be at

22680

peace with us. What Western Christianity is charged to carry to India is Christ; and what the ancient religion of India has to gain from Christianity is Christ—not a teacher only, but the Word made flesh, God entering our lives, our poverty and agonies, living as a working man in Eastern bazaars, dying the shameful death of a criminal slave.

THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF GOD'S FATHERHOOD. One Christian doctrine has profoundly influenced Rabindranath, and that is the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God. If the reader will turn back to the Santiniketan morning and evening hymns, he will see that, while the latter is Indian in wording and inspiration, the former is Christian, Christian in every phrase. And, whenever Rabindranath mentions Christ, it is this aspect of His teaching which he emphasises. Upon His declaration, 'I and My Father are one,' he builds an interpretation which all Christian exegesis would reject, but he is happy because Christ said the words. In his more buoyant moods, the Divine Lover or Sojourner of so many wistful images—the traveller who comes at night and vanishes before morning, the boatman who is out in the wildest storm, the player whose flute sounds through the heavy rain and the darkened forest,—becomes his Father, between Whom and His child's spirit there should not fall the least shadow of separation.

RABINDRANATH AND THE VEDAS AND UPANISHADS AND BUDDHA. The Christian influence is there, then. But the main ground of Rabindranath's religious teaching and belief is Indian, and (still more) individual. It is Indian. It will be remembered that in his earlier phase as poet, he believed in two dogmas, the love and joy of the Universe. He has believed in these to the end. The latter is characteristically Indian. Despite the lesson of that frank, joyous Life lived under the Syrian skies, in the loveliest land of all lands, among the dancing flower-seas of mountain pasture, upon the sun-kissed, shimmering waters of a lake, the West has never taken this joy into its belief. A Wordsworth may declare that

> ' 'tis my faith that every flower
> Enjoys the air it breathes.'

But who believes with him? Not bishop, not Baptist, not Methodist. Perchance a Francis of Assisi holds to this truth, but such an one comes not twice in a thousand years. But to the Indian Joy is as essential to the Universe as all-creating, all-upholding Love itself. So from the *Upanishads* Rabindranath wholeheartedly embraced this doctrine, from the *Rig-Veda* he took the freshness of those early Aryan dawns, and, because Christianity's doctrine of the Fatherhood of God chimed with these and with the feelings of his own soul also, he found a place for that; and he has lived by this faith. He believes, too, that all is Love, except man's hasty perversions of God's purposes in Time. From the *Upanishads* he learnt that life should be lived as closely to Nature as possible. Hence, his days have been cool with the breezes that make their way under boughs and through blossoms and his nights have been gentle with moonlight. It was said of Lord de Tabley that he never missed a sunset. Rabindranath cannot have missed much moonlight. These things have become the very warp and texture of his spirit. To them he has added the teaching of Buddha, for whom he has a boundless reverence. Buddha's compassion for all living things, and the wonder of his renunciation, have cast a golden splendour about man's history; and in Rabindranath's thought they have shone again, making his speech glow. He is almost more Buddhist than Hindu. Certainly, he is far more Buddhist than he is in sympathy with many forms of Hinduism that are most popular in his native Bengal.

RABINDRANATH AS A BRAHMO. In all this, I have been thinking of his attitude, so far as it could be expressed by any dogma or religion. A word should be added on his connection with the Brahmo Samaj, the church so closely linked with his family and in whose teachings he was brought up.

Nominally, and by inheritance, Rabindranath is a member of the parent body, the Adi Brahmo Samaj. He

is a most acceptable preacher, who pours out his whole soul. I shall never forget hearing him in early 1916, when the Brahmos were celebrating their centenary. He seemed almost tranced in adoration and meditation, as his voice went quietly and tensely through his prayer and address. The Jorasanko courtyard was crammed up to the galleries all round it, and everyone was watching that still, absorbed figure. After such services, he is exhausted, and empty of all nervous energy.

Today he rarely attends a service, unless he is himself the preacher. His failure to break down the conservatism of the Adi Samaj, in a matter on which he feels so strongly as he does on caste,—an episode referred to at some length in the second chapter of this book,—may have chilled his attitude towards a body which seemed cold and unprogressive. His sympathies are now rather with the *Sādhāran* Samaj,[1] which is the most vigorous branch of the Brahmo Samaj, numbering in its members a remarkable proportion of influential and well-known men. The Sādhāran Samaj has this year elected him an honorary member.

He has told me that he does not like missionaries, whether Christian or Brahmo, as he regards them as narrow-minded. He objects to dogmatism and propagandist work. Yet, if pressed, he would not deny that a man who cares greatly about truth that he has found is morally bound to try to bring it to others—which is the sufficient justification for all missionary work, whether Christian or Brahmo, Buddhist or Moslem. A man who is a missionary for such a reason has no place in his mind or attitude for arrogance or patronage, but should be humble and anxious to serve, willing to learn, respecting all men everywhere. So Rabindranath has found some of his best friends among both Christian and Brahmo missionaries, and admits the unselfish usefulness of the best among these. And, though he prefers to be regarded as a theist in the broad sense and shrinks

[1] *Sādhāran* means *common* (*i.e.* here, *universal* or *democratic*; almost, *catholic*).

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

from labels which suggest any sort of separatism, he would not deny that the Brahmo Samaj has been very important among the formative influences of his life. He belongs to the Hindu civilisation ; but he is unmistakably Brahmo, in his strong, clear theism, and his insistence on personal relationship with God as the thing that matters. The teaching and attitude of *Gitānjali* would never have surprised the West as they did, if the hymns of the Brahmo Samaj had been known. These hymns have not received the notice they deserve, as influences in his religious poetry. He himself has written some hundreds of hymns. It is mainly through the Brahmo channel that the abundant Christian influence in his life and thought has been mediated.

HIS RELIGION: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, NOT A THEOLOGY. But, when all is said, and said haltingly and uncertainly, the essential thing remains to be said. What matters in him is not what he may set before his audiences or readers as his doctrines, but his personal experience of God. Of the depth and sincerity of this no one who has read *Gitānjali* can doubt. God is strangely close to his thought. He is often more theistic than any Western theist. This has always struck me as the least-noted and yet the most remarkable thing in his religion, this way in which God becomes more personalised for him, the Indian, in the most intimate, individual fashion, than He does for the ordinary Christian. This is not Vedic, not Vedantist. I can only assume that he found it so in personal experience, that neither flesh nor blood revealed it to him but our Father in Heaven. 'My cup has been emptied,' he cries, in a letter to me, 'and I must run for dear life to the one living stream I know that flows in the depth of solitude.' He is a poet, and his mind is restless, and passes through moods of the darkest depression. All his life has been a conflict. Hence the troubled undertone of his religious work. It is the crying of the poet within him, of the eternal child. The world has wounded him, effort has drained, results have disappoint-

ed. While life remains, this note will never be silent. Yet beneath all he has a calm and a poise of spirit, which knows many seasons of uninterrupted restfulness.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS; HIS SIGNIFICANCE FOR OUR TIME. I suppose a word should be said as to personal characteristics. He is the most interesting of companions, witty and alive to every thought that rises. His gentleness and courage, his consideration, the dignity and nobility of his features, all combine to make up a personality whose fascination posterity will not be able to guess. This man, remarkable in himself, is still more remarkable as a prophecy of what is to be. After the farce of education and the tragedy of character, let us take hope, all of us who aspire to be counted among men of good will, patriotic Indian and sympathetic Englishman alike. Through him, we can believe that the end of this mingling of East and West will be good and not evil. Of that intermixture, and its results, men have seen enough that was hideous and depressing. But in *Gītānjali* came a result which was only lovely, a book that will stir men as long as the English language is read. We may feel that in such books and such a man we have the earnest that the enmity of East and West will be reconciled, that the mysterious destiny which has thrown a handful of northern islanders upon these ancient peoples will be justified. Both may believe that some better thing has been provided for them than aught either has yet experienced, that apart from the other neither could be made perfect. Neither he nor we have entered into the greatness of our heritage. Yet, in the words of F. W. H. Myers, 'we may trust and claim that we are living now among the scattered forerunners of such types of beauty and of goodness as Athens never knew.'[1]

[1] *Greek Oracles.*

INDEX

(Only titles of books or poems in italics.)

ADI Brahmo Samaj, 42 seq., 103 seq.
Alastor, 10
Almora, 39, 48
Ālōchana, 16
America, 22, 46, 53, 56, 89
Amiel's *Journal*, 23
Amritsar, 8, 55
Andrews, C. F., 44, 95 seq.
Arnold, Matthew, 33, 36, 38, 41
Art, Bengali, 6
Aryanism, 19, 64
Āshā, 84
Āsram (see Santiniketan)
As You Like It, 66
Athens, 106
Autobiography of the Maharshi, 4
Autumn-Festival, 42, 81
Awakening of the Waterfall, The, 88

BABY'S *Return, The*, 24
Bagehot, Henry, 47
Baikuntha's Manuscript, 80
Baisākh, 37
Balākā, 23, 28, 49, 52, 83, 96
Bālmiki Pratibhā, 14, 17
Banaphul, 10
Banerji, Hemchandra, 3, 10, 69
Bangadarshan, 37
Baptist Missionaries, 2
Bāsuki, 73
Bauthākurānir Hāt, 15
Bedi, 42
Bedouin, 64
Bengal Landscapes, 8, 9
Bengal Review, The (see *Bangadarshan*)
Berlin, 56
Bhagna-Hridaya, 12, 13
Bhānu Singh, 10, 11, 66
Bhārati, 9, 11, 20
Bibidha Prasanga, 15
Bidyabagish, Ramachandra, 4
Bidyasagar, Iswarchandra, 3
Bijayā-Milan, 40
Birrell, Augustine, 33
Bisarjan (see *Sacrifice*)
Blake, 81
Blank verse, 3, 25
Blessed Damosel, The, 79
Boat of Gold, The (see *Sōnār Tari*)
Bolpur, 5, 8, 9, 38, 43, 96 (and see Santiniketan)
Bombay, 11
Bose, Sir Jagadishchandra, 62, 76
Bose, Nandalal, 95
Brahmaputra, 51
Brahmo Samaj, 3, 5, 42 seq., 103-5
Broken Heart, The (see *Bhagna-Hridaya*)
Brown, T. E., 27, 76
Browning, Mrs., 9, 69
Browning, Robert, 19, 26, 43, 68, 69, 90
Bryant, W. C., 3
Buddha, 37, 99, 102-3
Burke, 93
Byron, 3

CALCUTTA, 15, 16, 42 (and see Jorasanko)
Calcutta University, 38, 43, 44, 67, 97

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Canton, William, 23
Carew, Thomas, 32
Carey, William, 2, 3
Caste, 62, 94
Cenci, The, 24, 90
Chaitāli, 28, 30, 70, 75
Chaitanya, 1, 2
Chaitra, 28
Chakrabarti, Ajitkumar, 15, 18, 20, 23, 30, 33, 35, 37, 39, 42, 57, 62, 63, 66, 77, 95
Chakrabarti, Biharilal, 10
Chandi, 2
Chandidas, 1
Chatterji, Bankimchandra, 3, 17
Chatterji, Nishikanta, 11
Chatterji, Saratchandra, 79
Chatterton, 10
Chaudhuri, Pramanath, 54
Chaudhuri, Mrs. Pramanath (Indira Devi), 78
Chelmsford, Lord, 55
Child's Book of Saints, A, 23
Child-Marriage, 19
Chips from a Poet's Workshop (see *Kanikā*)
Chitrā, 23, 27, 75, 76
Chitrāngadā (the English *Chitra*), 18, 24, 25, 27, 35, 43, 47-48, 80
Christabel, 79
Christianity, 3, 98-99, 100-103
Cloud and Sun, 73, 78
Coleridge, Samuel, 79
Conceits, 18
Conrad, Joseph, 45
Copenhagen, 56
Cowley, Abraham, 9
Crescent Moon, The, 46 seq.
Cromwell, 64
Crossing, 39, 40
Curse at Farewell, The, 26, 80
Cycle of Spring, The, 53, 81

DAEMON (of Socrates), 74
Dante, 62
Datta (Dutt), Michael, 3, 12, 18, 33
De Lalbihari, 2
Deirdre, 36
Delhi Durbar, 90
Denmark, 46, 56
Derozio, 3
De Tabley, Lord, 103
Dharma-Prachār (see *Preaching of Religion*)
Diary of a Journey to Europe, A, 20
Diary of the Five Elements, A, 21
Discussions (see *Ālōchanā*)
Doctorate of Literature, 44
Dream of Youth, The, 19
Dream-Journey, The, 7
Dryden, 57
Dublin, 81
Duff, Dr., 3
Duranta Āshā, 19, 20, 64
Durga, 2
Durga Puja, 40

ECHO, *The*, 74
Elder Sister, The, 78
Elizabethan verse, 18
Emergence, 16, 20
Endymion, 10, 13
England, 4, 11, 12, 34, 43, 51, 54-56
Epics, Indian, 1
Epistola ad Dakyns, 27, 76
Eternal Goodness, The, 25
Europe, 11, 12, 20, 46, 56
Evening, 27
Evening Songs, 13-15, 68, 72, 74, 82, 83, 88
Eyre, Governor, 89

FAIRIES, 14, 17
Farewell to Heaven, The, 27-28
Fateful Hunt, The, 14
Festival of Meeting Together in Victory (see Bijayā-Milan)
Fitzgerald, Edward, 43
Flight of Wild Cranes, A (see *Balākā*)
France, 46, 56
Francis of Assisi, St., 103
Free School, Calcutta, 87
Fruit-Gathering, 39, 49, 52

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

GĀNDHĀRI'S *Prayer*, 37, 69, 80
Ganges, 1, 3, 8, 9, 21-23, 49, 51, 61
Ganymede, 98
Garden, The, 76
Gardener, The, 27, 46, 75
Gāthā, 10
Genius of Vâlmiki, The (see *Bālmiki Pratibhā*)
Germany, 46, 56
Ghazipur, 19, 20
Gita Gōvinda, 1
Gitānjali (Bengali), 33, 34, 42, 52
Gitānjali (English), 11, 30, 33 seq., 43 seq., 48-49, 52, 61, 83-84, 87, 98-101, 105-6
Glimpses of Bengal, 22
God, Character of, 99
God, Fatherhood of, 102
Gods and Goddesses, 26
Gōrā, 39, 79
Grand Trunk Road, 20
Greek Oracles, 106
Green Leaf, The, 57
Gyānānkur, 9

HALDAR, Asitkumar, 95
Happiness, 49 seq.
Hare, David, 3
Hari (see Krishna)
Hasanta, 33, 35
Hastings, Warren, 2
Heart-Wilderness, 16
Himalayas, 8, 9, 39, 88
Hindu Marriage, 17
Holland, 46
Home and the World, The, 53, 69, 79, 90
Home of Peace (see Santiniketan),
Home University Library, 21, 54
Hood, Thomas, 69
Hope (see *Āshā*)
Hugo, Victor, 61
Hungry Stones, 78-79
Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, 67
Hyperion, 89

IDEA (Plato's Doctrine), 71, 74
Idolatry, 3, 4, 88, 98
Illumination, 15
Imagination (see *Kalpanā*)
Immortality, 99
Impossible Hope, The (see *Duranta Āshā*)
India Society, The, 43
Indian Christianity, 101
Ingrateful Beauty Threatened, 32
Inner Light, The, 74
International University, 21
Ireland, 34, 89
Irish Melodies, 14

JAMAICA, 89
Japan, 53
Jayadeva, 1
Jefferies, Richard, 30
Jhulan, 75
Jibandebata, 26-27, 35, 48, 74-76
Johnson, Dr., 26
Jonson, Ben., 62
Jorasanko, 6, 7, 16, 53, 104
Journal, Amiel's, 23
Joy, 30, 87-88, 102-3
Juvenilia, 6 seq., 16, 53

KABIKANKAN (see Mukundaram)
Kāhini, 33, 37
Kāl-Mrigayā (see *The Fateful Hunt*)
Kalanadi river, 15
Kali (see Durga)
Kalidasa, 1, 9, 10, 56, 66-67
Kalpanā, 33, 36 seq., 84
Kanikā, 33, 37, 49, 53
Kari ō Kōmal, 17-18, 25, 88
Karma, 98-99.
Karna and Kunti, 37, 69, 80, 82
Karunā, 12
Kathā, 33, 37, 39
Karwar, 15-16
Keats, 6, 13, 24, 68-69, 89
Kheā (see *Crossing*)
Kim, 39
King and Queen, 19, 20, 24-25, 48

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

King of the Dark Chamber, The, 42, 81
Kingdom of Cards, The, 78
Knighthood, 44, 55, 90
Krishna, 1, 2, 11, 67, 98
Kshanikā, 28, 33 seq., 83

LAKSHMI, 5, 74
Lakshmi's Testing, 80-81
Last Word, The, 36
Letter to Lord Chesterfield (Dr. Johnson's), 26
Letters of a Visitor to Europe, 11-12
Lilā, 100
Lion of the Sun, The (see *Bhānu Singh*)
Living or Dead, 73-74, 78
London, 81
Lost Jewels, The, 79
Lost Leader, The, 90
Love, 30, 103
Lover's Gift, 51
Lynching, 89

MACMILLANS, 43
Maeve, 36
Mahalanobis, Prasanta, 12, 16, 18, 20, 43, 54, 66-67
Maharshi (see Debendranath Tagore)
Mahratta, 32, 37
Maithili, 1
'Maids of Illusion,' 17
Mālini, 25-26, 48, 82
Mānasi, 19, 26, 63-64, 66, 69, 72, 75
Marlowe, 66
Marston, Philip, 69
Māshi, 77
Marvell, Andrew, 76
Māyār Khelā, 16-17
Meghnādbodh, 3, 12
Men and Women, 26
Milton, 3, 23, 29, 68
Mind's Embodiment, The (see *Mānasi*
Missionary work, 2, 64, 104
Modern Review, The, 94
Moguls, 91
Moonlight, 27
Moore, Thomas, 14
Morley, Henry, 12, 23
Morning Songs, 14-16, 74, 87
Mukherji, Sir Asutosh, 43
Mukundaram, 2
Music, 7 14, 20
Mutiny, The Sepoy, 39, 89
My Lord the Bāby (see *The Baby's Return*)
Myers, Ernest, 69
Myers, F. W. H., 106
Mysticism, 46

NAIBEDYA, 42
Nalini, 16
Narak Bas (see *Sojourn in Hell, A*)
Nationalism, 89-91
Nationalism, 53, 90-91, 93
Nature's Revenge, 16, 26, 48
Neo-Hinduism, 19, 41
New Essays in Criticism, 83
Night of Full Moon, A, 27
Nivedita, Sister, 2
Nobel Prize, 44, 62
Noble, Margaret (see Sister Nivedita)

OATEN, E., 53
Obiter Dicta, 33
Ode on a Grecian Urn, 69
Olor Iscanus, 5
Omar Khayyam, 36, 43
Ophelia, 12
Oxford, 56

PADMA (see Ganges)
Palātakā, 54
Palit, Loken, 12, 68
Pandits, 2, 33 seq., 52
Paracelsus, 26
Partition Agitation, 39 seq., 79, 90
Paul, St., 63, 101
Pearson, W., 95-97
Personality, 53-54
Phālguni (see *Cycle of Spring, The*)
Phelps, Myron W., 94

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore, 65, 98
Pictures and Songs, 16-18
Pis-Aller, 36
Pity (see *Karunā*)
Plato, 74
Play of Illusion, The (see *Māyār Khelā*
Poetry of Rabindranath Tagore, 27, 86
Poet's Dream, The (see Āshā)
Poet's Story, The, 10
Post-Office, The, 42, 81
Prabhāt Sangit (see *Morning Songs*)
Preaching of Religion, 19, 29, 64, 86
Precepts of Jesus, The, 4
Presidency College, The, 53
Punch, 48
Punjab Troubles, The, 55
Purdah, 62
Puri, 2

QUAKER, 74
Queen Mab, 13

RABINDRANATH, 20, 30, 33, 35, 41
Rabindranath Tagore, 34
Radha, 11, 67
Radhakrishnan, Professor, 65, 98
Rājā (see *King of the Dark Chamber, The*)
Rajarshi, 17
Rama, 1
Ramprasad, 2, 99
Ray, Dwijendralal, 75
Ray, Rammohan, 2-4, 30
Ray, Satischandra, 95
Rāyats, 23, 31
Real sense, 29-30
Reincarnation, 99
Religio Medici, 12, 23
Remembrance, 39
Reminiscences, My, 6-9, 11, 13, 16, 87-88
Renaissance, Indian, 2, 6
Requiescat, 41
Rhys, Ernest, 34, 48, 82
Riddle Solved, The, 78
Rig-Veda, 103
Ring and the Book, The, 69
River, The, 32
Robin Hood, 14
Roses, 19
Rossetti, Christina, 69
Rossetti, D. G., 79, 88
Rothenstein, W., 6, 43
Rudra, 37
Rudrachandra, 12
Runaway, The (see *Palātakā*)
Russian Novel, The, 39

SABUJ-PATRA (see Green Leaf, The)
Sacrifice, 17, 24-25, 48, 80, 82
Sādhanā (Bengali), 20-21, 25, 28-29, 31-32, 80
Sādhanā (English), 20, 46 seq.
Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 104
Sāhitya, 32
Saint-King, The (see *Rājarshi*)
Saktism, 2
Salvationist, 19, 64, 101
Samālōchanā, 17
Sandhyā Sangit (see *Evening Songs*)
Sanskrit, 1, 5, 33, 35, 65, 68
Santiniketan, 38, 41 seq., 52-53, 55, 81, 94-98
Santiniketan, 42
Sanyāsi, The (see *Nature's Revenge*)
Saraswati, 5
Sarkar, Jadunath, 54
Sastri, Sibanath, 42
Sati, 3
Sati, 37
Schiller, 11
Scott, 3, 10
Seal, Brajendranath, 6, 83
Season's End, The, 37
Sea-Waves, 72-73, 86
Sen, Binayendranath, 42
Sen, Keshabchandra, 4, 42
Sen, Kshitishmohan, 42
Sen, Mohitchandra, 15-16, 19, 39
Sen, Nabinchandra, 3

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Serampur, 2
Shakspere, 56, 62, 66, 68
Shantiniketan, 95, 97
Sharps and Flats (see *Kari ō Kōmal*)
Shelley, 10, 13, 19, 22, 24, 67-69, 90
Shileida, 20-22, 31, 78
Short Stories, 23-24, 77 seq.
Sikhs, 10, 32, 37
Skeleton, The, 78
Smaran (see *Remembrance*)
Soul's Beauty, 88
Socrates, 74
Sojourn in Hell, A, 37
Sōnār Tari, 26, 75-76
Sonnet, The, 3, 18, 28
Soul's Beauty, 88
Sprouting Knowledge (see *Gyānānkur*),
Squire, J. C., 48
Stanzas in Memory of the Author of Obermann, 38
Stevenson, R. L., 47
Story of My Heart, The, 30
Story, The Poet's, 10
Stray Birds (see *Kanikā*)
Subhā, 77-78
Sudder, St., 87-88
Swadesh Sankalpa, 39
Swadeshi enterprises, 9
Swadeshi movement, 29
Swarāj, 30
Sweden, 46, 56
Swinging (see *Jhulan*)

TAGORE, Abanindranath, 6
Tagore, Debendranath, 4 seq., 20, 38, 88, 96
Tagore, Dwarkanath, 4 seq.
Tagore, Dwijendranath, 5 seq., 95
Tagore, Gagendranath, 6
Tagore, Jyotirindra, 5 seq., 14
Tagore, Rathindranath, 22
'Tagorites,' 81-82
Taj, 91
Ten Directions, The, 49, 73
Thompson, E. W., 100
Theism, 105
To His Friend, 5
Torn Letters, 22 seq.
Transmigration, 98-99
Tribedi, Ramendrasundar, 54
Trust Property, The, 78
Twenty-Five Colloquies, 6

UNIVERSITY Extension Lectures, 54
Upanishads, 102-3
Urbasi, 27-28, 30, 35, 69, 71, 84-86

VAISNAVISM, and Vaisnava Lyrists, 1, 10, 66-67, 98
Various Topics (see *Bibidha Prasanga*)
Vaughan, Henry, 5
Vedas, 102-3, 105
Vedantism, 101, 105
Vernacular, Ignorance of, among officials, 92
Vidyapati, 1
Virgil, 26
Vishnu, 98

W. *V., Her Book*, 23
War, The, 54, 93-94
Webster, Augusta, 69
West, Influence of, 2 seq.
What is Momentary (see *Kshanikā*)
Whittier, J. G., 25
Wild Flowers (see *Banaphul*)
Women, Position of in India, 19, 62-64, 78, 94
Wordsworth, 47, 68, 96, 102-3
World University, 55
Wreck, The, 39

YEATS, W. B., 34 seq., 43, 46, 82

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